

Communicating with Americans:  
Chinese International Students' Experiences and Perceptions

By

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Cooper S. Wakefield

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Chairperson: Yan Bing Zhang, Ph.D.

---

Adrianne D. Kunkel, Ph.D.

---

Donn W. Parson, Ph.D.

---

Alesia Woszidlo, Ph.D.

---

Lizette A. Peter, Ph.D.

Date Defended: April 14, 2014

The Dissertation Committee for Cooper S. Wakefield  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chairperson: Yan Bing Zhang, Ph.D.

Date approved: April 22, 2014

### **Abstract**

Chinese international students are the fastest growing group of internationals nationwide and in the state of Kansas (see: Open Doors Data, 2012; & University of Kansas ISSS, 2012). This research investigates the interaction between Americans and Chinese internationals from the perspective of 33 Chinese international students in Kansas. This inquiry is necessary because international students have a high need and desire to communicate with and befriend the hosts, yet research indicates that most internationals: lack intensive interactions that are key to their adjustment, success, and overall well-being in the United States (Gareis, 2000; Sias, et al, 2008); struggle with the English language; and remain isolated from Americans, in spite of their desire to adapt to American culture and befriend Americans.

Analysis of in-depth interviews with Chinese international students reveals that they perceive Americans as friendly and outgoing, but also closed to new perspectives. Disappointment over friendship development and communication is exacerbated by language and cultural differences, which often leads to separation strategies of acculturation for Chinese. While Chinese typically exert great effort in academic performance and language study, they exhibit weak adaptation behaviors, perhaps mistaking familiarity with American media with an in-depth understanding of American culture and norms.

This research provides needed feedback regarding what is working well with international programs, the extent and quality of intercultural contact occurring on American campuses, and allows Chinese international students to express their experiences, opinions, and emotions regarding their experiences through the use of the

Chinese language. Recommendations are made for Chinese international students, and for higher education administrators regarding how to facilitate integration between Americans and Chinese international students.

**Key words:** Chinese international students, intercultural competence, intercultural friendship, acculturation, perceptions of Americans, culture.

*To Daisy, Marcus, and Ellie, who gave me support,  
joy, encouragement, and diversion through  
the Ph.D. process.  
How do those without families do it?*

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale**

Higher education institutions in the United States are progressively focusing on internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007), and students from Mainland China are currently the most numerous of any nationality on university campuses in the U.S. [in 2011, Mainland Chinese international students reached 157,558, accounting for 21.8% of all international students ("Open doors data," 2012)]. Based on these figures, the opportunities for Chinese and American students to experience direct contact have increased substantially. Prior studies (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) have established that contact between members of different groups is an effective way to improve intergroup relations. However, for many individuals, intercultural communication is intimidating, full of anxieties about successfully navigating the contact experience, and uncertainties in predicting the encounter (Gudykunst, 1998). Findings from studies in intercultural communication indicate that the amount of actual interaction is quite low in American campus situations, even when opportunities are many. For example, the studies conducted by Halualani and colleagues found that more than half of American students reported only having one to two interactions in a two-week period and that these interactions were typically from 0-30 minutes in length, and usually occur in an academic or work environment (Halualani, 2008; Halualani, Chitgopekar, Huynh, Morrison, & Dodge, 2004; Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison, & Dodge, 2004; Peacock & Harrison, 2009; Volet & Ang, 1998). In a similar vein, Ward, Masgore, Ho, Holmes, Cooper, Newton, & Crabbe's (2005) research also indicated that communication frequency between New Zealand students and international students is low (41% of students had no international friends, 32% of New Zealanders never interact with internationals outside of classes, and 45% never work with internationals in a study group). Other research indicates that American students' attitudes

toward international students are mixed, but that their knowledge about internationals is low and interactions between them are infrequent (Imamura, 2011; Ward et al., 2005). Ward et al.'s exploration of the experiences of international students in New Zealand reveals that while internationals felt they had the opportunity to learn about the host country, there were relatively few opportunities for them to share about their culture in the classroom. (Ward & Masgoret, 2004), which illustrates the oftentimes one-sided nature of "internationalization" of western education. Therefore, the current study aims to examine intercultural communication between Chinese and Americans by focusing on the perspective of Chinese international students. Using in-depth interviews, the study will examine Chinese international students' accounts of their positive and negative communication with Americans. Findings in this study enhance our understanding of the factors and processes leading to positive and negative contact outcomes between international and American students at both interpersonal (e.g., friendships) and intergroup levels (e.g., more positive intergroup attitudes, reduced biases and stereotypes).

The intergroup contact theory line of research within intercultural and intergroup communication tests and explains the effects of intergroup contact. Intergroup contact has come to be studied so explicitly because intergroup contact, including intercultural contact, may produce: anxiety, prejudice, misunderstanding, and overall negative evaluations (Pettigrew, 1997; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002), reinforce negative attitudes, all of which may lead to racism, discrimination or, in extreme cases, interethnic conflict and war, terrorism, slavery, or genocide. Relevant examples include historical and contemporary discrimination faced by immigrants to the United States, negative feelings that remain between European Americans and African Americans, or recent ethnic conflicts in Serbia or Sudan (Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Lustig & Koester, 2010).

Intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998) has evolved from Gordon Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, which he developed to clarify the mistaken assumption that contact by itself would reduce negative intergroup attitudes and behaviors. Allport (1954) suggested that four necessary conditions must be met to achieve positive outcomes [equal status, support of authorities (appropriate normative context), common goal, cooperative interdependence (friendship potential)]. More recent research, however (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005), has shown that while Allport's original conditions are helpful, it is better to think of positive intergroup relations as a product of: quality contact; more contact with diverse members of the outgroup; eliminating negative factors (like anxiety); and for contact to occur over enough time that friendship has a chance to develop. Nonetheless, many programs, such as study abroad and international student outreaches seem to count on merely putting internationals and Americans in close proximity in order to achieve positive intergroup relations (reduced stereotypes and prejudices), as well as facilitate intercultural competence (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). However, reports suggest that in spite of increased opportunities for contact, students tend to stick with their ingroups and engage in intergroup communication mainly in structured contexts such as professional or academic settings (Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison, et al., 2004). According to other research, this lack of interaction is especially true of Americans interacting with Asian students (Sam, 2001; Sias et al., 2008; Volet & Ang, 1998). Therefore, the goal of this project is to investigate the experiences of Chinese international students on U.S. university campuses in order to get a clearer picture of their actual interactions with Americans: when and how have they had positive communication and relationships, when and how have they had negative communication and interactions, and their overall perceptions of ideal communication with Americans.

Positive intercultural communication between groups is not only beneficial by leading to reduced prejudice and stereotypes, it also promotes acculturation and adjustment for sojourners and migrants. The vast acculturation research spearheaded by Berry and his colleagues (Berry, 1970, 1997, 2003, 2005, 2008; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Berry & Sam, 1997a; Berry & Sam, 1997b) indicates that the best results of intercultural adjustment for sojourners and long-term migrants occurs when there is a high commitment to interacting with host cultural individuals on the part of the sojourning or immigrating individuals, complemented by an ability and desire of the adjusting individual to maintain their native culture and relationships, a condition Berry refers to as “integration” (1997). Berry’s more recent work has addressed a contradiction that sometimes arises. Some host cultures, including the United States, are not as open to allowing integration, forcing adjusting groups or individuals to choose one of the other less preferable options: “assimilation,” which is the loss of the home culture, in favor of immersion and acquisition of the new culture; “separation,” which is the maintaining primarily of the home culture, without acquiring or interacting much with the new culture; or “marginalization,” which is the loss of the home culture, coupled with a failure to acquire the new culture, the least preferable option by far (Berry, 2005, 2008). Berry notes that this resistance to integration, on the part of the United States, is reflected in the melting pot metaphor that remains a popular, though inaccurate, picture of American immigration (Berry, 2008). It should also be noted, that integration is the most preferable strategy in the eyes of most intercultural sojourners and migrants themselves (Greenland & Brown, 1999).

Interaction between American and international students on U.S. campuses can also have positive effects on the American students. As globalization continues to reshape the world, university administrators have realized that American students need to develop “international

competence” if they are going to be able to work meaningfully in an international and intercultural environment. An example of this change is reflected in the newly revised core curricular goals of the University of Kansas. Among six total core goals, the fourth goal is related to diversity, cultural understanding, and global awareness, and notes, “Students will learn to analyze regional and international issues and perspectives, enabling them to engage with the languages, cultures, customs, beliefs, and/or behaviors from the world’s various communities (“KU core: Goals, learning outcomes, and curricular criteria,” 2012). While the KU Core does not explicitly note the growing diversity on campus, or indicate that increased positive interaction between Americans and internationals will help achieve this goal, clearly, if the university finds global awareness, international perspectives, and cultural understanding to be key goals, then it should behoove us to research the current state of intercultural contact between the largest international group and Americans, and to explore how more positive interactions can be encouraged and facilitated.

In addition to the potential for intercultural interaction on U.S. campuses due to the presence of international students, American students are encouraged to study abroad, which is intended to facilitate global awareness and international competence (Pedersen, 2009; Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009). As of 2009-2010, 13,910 American students abroad chose to study in China, making it the fifth most popular destination for study abroad. This is a 470 percent increase of American students in China compared to 1999-2000, when China was the eleventh most popular country to choose for study abroad (“Open doors data,” 2012). With so much interest in China from American students, combined with the university objectives to gain international and global perspectives, it would seem that American students would grasp the opportunity to interact with Chinese internationals. This study explores Chinese students’

perceptions of American students' eagerness to interact with Chinese.

This study intends to approach Chinese international students since the well-being and successful adaptation of internationals is based in part on their interaction with the host culture (Berry, 1997), and they should be the most motivated to communicate interculturally. Also, in the United States, their voice is less represented, and understanding more clearly what their perceptions of their interactions with Americans are like will provide specific ways that programs can be developed and improved.

### **Significance**

This research provides new perspectives and insight on the phenomena of intercultural communication and intercultural friendship. According to the rationale above, the relationships and communication between American and Chinese students effects the acculturation of the Chinese students, attitudes of both groups toward each other, and the intercultural/international competence and perspectives of American students. Thus, gaining a better understanding of the current phenomena is a first step in helping to practically improve intercultural communication on U.S. campuses. This research also provides meaningful feedback on international friendship programs that currently seek to facilitate interactions on campuses. Theoretically, this research hopes to expand and support current research on intergroup contact theory, communication accommodation theory, acculturation theory and cultural sensitivity.



## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Considerations and Literature Review**

Several theoretical approaches to intercultural communication are relied upon in this study. This research is situated within a long line of research regarding interactions between Americans and non-Americans, Westerners with non-Westerners, Chinese with Westerners, and Chinese with Americans. This literature review will define key terms and highlight the crucial theories and specific intercultural communication research findings relevant to this area of inquiry.

While this research does not attempt to scientifically or interpretively define or explicate Chinese or American culture, it does recognize the reality of culture and its significance to communication. In most everyday, intra-cultural interactions culture is not salient, but in intercultural interaction, such as between Americans and Chinese international students, culture becomes an important context or variable of communication (Hall, 1981; Hall & Hall, 1990). Therefore, culture is a key, overarching factor related to this research, and how respondents perceive the cultural differences and barriers is important to recognize. In this section, I will define culture and map out the subthemes related to culture that respondents discussed.

### **Defining Culture**

As numerous scholars have noted, culture is a difficult term to define clearly and is often contested based on the research approach of the scholar. Therefore definitions range from “the total way of life of a people” (Kluckhohn & Kroeber, 1952), to “symbolic vehicles of meaning” (Swidler, 1986), or the “webs of significance” that we ourselves have spun (Geertz, 1994). Borrowing from Lustig and Koester, I consider culture to be a “learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, which affect behaviors” (Lustig & Koester, 2010). This set of shared interpretations is learned over time by a significantly large

group of people, but is not equal to nationality or ethnicity or race (Lustig & Koester, 2010).

Values is the name given to the ideas people hold and are taught about what is right and wrong, good or bad, appropriate and inappropriate. Values are a constitutive element of culture and have become one of the key metrics used to judge ourselves and others as people in our culture (Lustig & Koester, 2010), and can be seen as the underlying rationale for behavior, or as Geert Hofstede has said, values are the “software of the mind” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Values (as well as beliefs, and norms) are noted to be aspects of culture that are not aware of, and that we learn as youngsters and which usually influence us all through life. This aspect of culture, we cannot easily change, “like a suit of clothes” (Hall, 1959), and therefore gaining awareness of one’s own culture, and adapting to a new culture are both seen as long-term, difficult, and anxiety inducing processes (Gudykunst, 1998). Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) pioneered the study of values and identified a values orientation by which they could classify a culture. In the decades following researchers such as Hofstede, Triandis, Bond, Schwartz, and many others, have researched and classified values, which have enlightened the study of culture and intercultural communication. To touch on a few key values, Americans typically score high on individualism (a value related to the preference for autonomy from others) and low on power distance (a value for the lessening of status differences between people, thus valuing equality)(Hofstede, 2012). Chinese tend to be collectivistic (a value related to the preference for connectivity and interrelatedness with in-group members) and high in power distance (a value that heightens status differences between people) (Hofstede, 2012).

While values are a crucial aspect of culture, they do not capture all of its fullness. Culture is also made up of norms of behavior, beliefs, and social practices. Beyond these concepts, culture also includes all of the visible and observable aspects of human life:

communication patterns, food, art, education, family life, romantic expectations, religion, popular culture, language, dress, etc. These observable things are often taken to be culture itself, while in fact they are the outward and observable aspects of a culture (Hall, 1959; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Typically, ideal acculturation by an individual, requires her or him to accept and adapt to both the observable, above the surface aspects of culture, as well as the invisible but influential values, beliefs, and norms that lie below (Berry, 1997; Hall, 1981; Kim, 2012).

Edward T. Hall, one of the “grandfathers” of intercultural communication once wrote that, “culture is communication, and communication is culture” (Hall, 1959). While this statement seems to indicate that culture and communication are the same, his point was not to create an accurate definition of culture, but to draw attention to the interplay between culture and communication, to show that culture is not simply observable differences, but rather, is foundational to how human beings see and make sense of the world, and therefore, how and what, and with whom they communicate.

### **Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Berry’s Acculturation Model**

Social identity theory was developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) in order to explain the workings of intergroup behavior. SIT is based on the assumptions that individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem; they strive for a positive self-concept; and social groups or categories and the membership of them are associated with positive or negative value connotations. Hence, social identity may be positive or negative according to the valuations of those groups that contribute to an individual’s social identity; and the evaluation of one’s own group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics (Turner & Reynolds, 2003). These assumptions lead

to the three basic principles of SIT: (1) people look to their groups to receive positive social identity and self-esteem, (2) they tend to determine evaluations of their own group by comparing it with relevant outgroups, and (3) when they are dissatisfied with the assessment of their group, they will tend to enact one of three strategies: leaving the group, social creativity, or social competition (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1981). Turner (1981) argues that all human interactions fall somewhere on a continuum between interpersonal and intergroup. Interpersonal interactions are ones where group memberships are not salient and people treat each other according to their individual characteristics and relational history. Intergroup interactions are ones where certain group markers are salient for one or more participants, which results in intergroup biases: seeing outgroup members as homogeneous, prejudiced attitudes toward outgroup members, favoritism toward the ingroup, and tendency to act like ingroup members (Harwood, 2006; Hornsey, 2008; Palomares, 2008). Social identity theory has been used by theorists as an assumption behind other intergroup and intercultural theories such as: intergroup contact theory and communication accommodation theory, but also undergirds intercultural theories such as Berry's Acculturation Model.

Berry's Acculturation Model is one of the most widely researched and cited theories related to intercultural adaptation and acculturation (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999; Ward, 2008). Berry's theory has been tested with long-term migrants, sojourners, tourists, and students (Berry, 1970, 1997, 2008; Berry et al., 1987; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Zheng & Berry, 1991). Berry's key principles are that acculturating individuals must negotiate two key processes: first, whether they choose to have a high or low amount of contact and interaction with the new cultural group (including individuals, language, developing cultural knowledge, etc.); and second, how committed they are to maintaining their original cultural identity through

contact with people from home, keeping traditions, speaking the language, etc. These two factors lead to four possible orientations or strategies for the acculturating individuals: (1) separation (maintaining home group culture, but not much contact with the new culture, which leads to high socio-cultural stress and poor overall adaptation), (2) assimilation (giving up home group culture, in order to take on the new culture fully, which leads to lower socio-cultural stress, but leaves individuals vulnerable since they may have little social support from their home culture), (3) marginalization (both the loss of the home culture and failure to adopt the new culture as well, which leads to the most negative results: high socio-cultural stress as well as poor mental health), and (4) integration (a high degree of connecting with the new culture combined with a commitment to maintain the original culture, which leads to the most positive outcomes for acculturating individuals) (Berry, 1997).

A second factor in the acculturation process, which Berry has increasingly noted (Berry, 2003, 2005, 2008), is that the host society plays a key role in the possible acculturation strategies of individuals. In other words, societies that are more accepting of multiculturalism, make it more acceptable for acculturating individuals to choose the Integration option (which is almost unanimously the preferred option for long-term acculturation). Canada, for instance, is perceived to be more open to multiculturalism than the U.S., which has historically taken a more assimilationist attitude toward immigrants (Berry, 2008). With this process in mind, the social identity perspective is relevant because acculturation is not simply related to the choices of the acculturating individuals, but is a process that occurs through the interaction and attitudes of both groups.

In a qualitative focus group study of students on U.K. campuses Peacock and Harrison (2009) investigated the perceptions of British students toward international students. While the

study did not claim to have a social identity theory basis, British students tended to note “us-them” differences with international students, particularly when there were large groups of one ethnicity that stuck together. The British students claimed to understand the need for internationals to have home cultural interactions, but nonetheless saw large groups of internationals as outsiders. Additionally, when British students noted poorer language skills combined with a perception of introversion, they tended to perceive the international students less favorably. British students also noted that their drinking culture could be an intimidating barrier to international students and the majority of interaction between British students and international students seems to occur in the academic environment. Humor and clothing styles were also seen as barriers or markers of difference between the groups, and sports, especially football (i.e.: soccer) was found to be an activity that was able to bring the students together. U.K. students were able to see some benefit of having international students on campus: they could gain direct information about other cultures and countries; they gained a desire to travel and experience other places; and they gained an appreciation for learning to communicate interculturally. However, the examples that students gave indicated that their communications tended to be rather superficial and there was relatively little evidence that students had benefitted from in-depth intercultural experiences.

Zimmermann (1995) conducted 101 structured interviews with international students in the United States to investigate dimensions of intercultural adaptation, competence, and interactions. The most important factor in terms of students overall intercultural adaptation was the frequency with which they interacted with American students. It should be noted that length of residence was not related to satisfaction or adjustment, which indicates that international students’ attitude toward acculturation upon arrival is very important and a failure to adjust and

make host-cultural relationships quickly may have long-term consequences. Zimmermann notes that in addition to teaching skills and abilities in English, providing opportunities to talk with Americans seems to be the biggest need in enhancing international students' adaptation.

In a survey of 497 internationals on an American campus, Trice (2004) found that nearly one third of participants socialized with Americans only once a semester or not at all. Respondents interacted socially more with non-conational international students, but less than with conationals (conationals being international students from their own country). However, international students who were ethnically or culturally more similar to Americans (such as most European international students) interacted with Americans at least every other week. Students from East and Southeast Asia were generally concerned with this lack of interaction, expressing their desire to interact with Americans because they understood it would help them adjust to the cultural differences.

For this present study, SIT and Berry's Acculturation Model are useful to guide the understanding of the motives and choices of both Chinese and Americans. Specifically, while many Chinese international students desire to choose the integration strategy so as to maintain their Chinese identity and relationships, as well as adapt to American culture and develop meaningful relationships interculturally, they may be limited in their ability to do so by the expectations of Americans. Berry now recognizes that the home cultural attitudes play a role in the strategies that sojourners choose (2008). In this present study, this understanding may explain the experiences of Chinese who feel constrained in their choice of strategies. This may also explain how attitudes of Americans may lead to more or less satisfactory experiences of Chinese students.

## Intergroup Contact Theory

Intergroup contact theory traces its origin back to Allport's Contact Hypothesis (1954), which states that there are four necessary conditions for optimum intergroup contact: equal status between groups, the support of the authorities (appropriate normative context), a common goal for both groups to work toward, and cooperative interdependence (friendship potential), for optimum contact. Allport (1954) knew that contact alone did not necessarily lead to better relationships, and could to some extent, lead to more conflict, noting historical examples to illustrate this. However, his study of positive examples of intergroup contact, mostly between blacks and whites in the United States, informed his premise that when the four conditions are met, then better relationships would be the result (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005), and research generally has found that this is the case (Brewer, 1996; Pettigrew, 1998).

Over time, additional conditions were added to the Contact Hypothesis, eventually leading scholars to go beyond the attempt to create a master list of optimal conditions, and instead, influenced by social identity theory, seek to understand the processes involved in contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). Understanding contact begins with understanding intergroup processes: group members are assumed to be relatively alike; trust and liking are generalized to ingroup members; and negative interdependence is associated with outgroup members (Brewer, 1996). With these principles in mind, researchers have attempted to unpack the factors that hinder and help contact.

The key variable that has been found that may negate the effects of contact is anxiety about interacting with outgroup members (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). Voci and Hewstone (2003) go as far as to suggest that the reducing of anxiety may be *the key* process involved in contact that leads to positive outcomes. Anxiety has been found to be caused



and/or reduced by several different processes, specifically as communicators learn about one another over time, anxiety is generally reduced (Gudykunst, 2005a). In the current study, the anxiety experienced by Chinese students about interacting with Americans may be an important factor in their choices to pursue or shy away from communicating.

Tropp (2003) and Tropp and Pettigrew (2005) found that an important factor that may hinder the intergroup contact process is the socio-historical context, in particular, whether individuals have had past experiences of prejudice. In these studies, past prejudices have been shown to lead to resistance to the effects of contact. Tropp and Pettigrew (2005), as well as Eller and Abrams (2004) note experiences of prejudice may lead to more anxiety about intergroup contact. These researchers agree that contact that occurs over longer periods of time is important in changing or modifying stereotypes and ameliorating attitudes. Pettigrew and Tropp (2005) note that in several historical cases, even contact that occurred under negative conditions, but which occurred over time, for example, black housekeepers that were not equal with their white employers, produced positive outcomes. The principle that they note is that familiarity breeds liking (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and along these same lines, friendship is another of the key process that Pettigrew and Tropp (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005, 2006) find can overcome entrenched stereotypes. Allport's conditions are now considered to be facilitating factors rather than essential ones (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005).

Several processes are involved with the increase or reduction of anxiety and should be incorporated into contact applications. These findings are: keeping both intergroup and interpersonal salience high (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Gaertner, Dovidio, & Saguy, 2007); which can help generalize positive effects of contact to outgroups and reduce anxiety for minorities; being aware of the socio-historical contexts, specifically prejudice or discrimination,

which can lead to a resistance to the effects of contact; greater amounts of time; more interaction with greater numbers of outgroup members; knowledge about the outgroup; and the time required for the development of friendships. In some cases, controlling these factors have even been shown to lead to positive outcomes even when historical conditions prohibited Allport's four optimal conditions from operating (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Pettigrew's re-theorized model posits that learning about the outgroup, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal are the four key processes that occur in optimum contact that lead to positive outcomes (Pettigrew, 1998).

Researching the general interaction between ethnic/cultural groups on a diverse U.S university context, Halualani, Chitgopekar, Huynh, Morrison, and Dodge (2004) found that individuals from most groups tended to engage in relatively narrow patterns mainly with their own ethnic group, or with one other major ethnic group. Moreover, the researchers found that the majority of the interaction happened on campus or in work situations, rather than in social situations. A qualitative follow-up study indicated that even though 72 out of 100 participants valued the diversity of the campus environment, they still only maintained limited contact with people outside of their own ethnic group (Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison, et al., 2004).

A study conducted with international and Australian students in an Australian university found relatively little interaction between international students and native Australian students as both groups preferred to work with their cultural peers even after successful intercultural experiences (Volet & Ang, 1998). Focus group interviews with mixed groups and same cultural groups revealed that both sides share responsibility for the lack of interaction as Australian students tend to believe that internationals would rather keep to themselves, while internationals think that Australians are not interested in interacting with them. Volet and Ang argue that

language may be less of a factor than it is often assumed since students with high English levels (such as Singaporean students) preferred to work with other Asians who had lower English levels, rather than with Australians.

Organizing and researching a test of the Contact Hypothesis, Todd and Nesdale (1997) effectively facilitated contact between Australian and international students over a six month period of time through an orientation program and structured contact programming. Results of a survey questionnaire indicate that compared with a control group, the interactions resulted in positive effects consistent with the Contact Hypothesis and that the results generalized to the general university setting. Success factors that are recommended to other groups are: there should be more full overlap between the natural areas of students' lives and the activities, rather than tangential connections; the commitment and skills of the facilitators need to be high; the commitment of the participants must also be high. The authors note that the final factor may be becoming increasingly difficult due to the increase in numbers of international students from certain countries, which allows international students to rely on home-cultural connections rather than to be forced into expending the effort necessary to contact with host-cultural students.

Students in the United Kingdom are described as being more focused on their complex social life, the needs that come along with fitting into their groups, and the goals of having a good time rather than focusing on their schoolwork and developing deep relationships and friendship. This can be a barrier to international students and may be a factor leading to weaker bonds when connections are developed between internationals and Brits (Montgomery, 2010). Discussing friendship, Lustig and Koester (2010) note that European Americans tend to compartmentalize their friendships depending on activity type, and that relationships are more fragmented than many international friendships would be, especially Asian cultures, where the

person is seen more as a whole. The authors note that Chinese friendships are expected to extend to all aspects of life, and often give advice about what to do, something that may bother Americans who prize their individuality.

Gareis (2000) examined the positive and negative friendship experiences of Germans international students interacting with Americans. Participants expressed that the understandings about what friendship meant were different and although Americans were friendly on the outside, they were hard to get to know well according to the German ideals. Although disappointment with American friends is a theme in the literature, and negative experiences were discussed and examined, the German participants were mostly content with their friendship experiences in the U.S.

Comparing intra and inter-cultural relationships through 30 in-depth interviews, (2008) Sias, Drzewiecka, Meares, Bent, Konomi and Ortega found that important factors for intercultural friendship development included: targeted socializing, cultural similarities, cultural differences, and prior intercultural experience. Perceived similarity focused on culture-general characteristics, such as Chinese and Korean students being “Asian” and thus having commonalities, or the fact that international students were all “non-American” and thus similar in that way. On the other hand, cultural differences were also seen as a positive factor in friendship development - especially those with prior positive intercultural experiences - because they seemed to enjoy getting to know the unique perspectives of another culture. Language differences also both hindered and helped friendship formation. Results showed it was a challenge, but those who overcame the difficulties were able to develop rich friendships, with the result that linguistic differences sometimes allowed friends to develop their own “language” and vocabulary, which heightened liking (Sias et al., 2008).

Since research is showing that intercultural communication is fairly limited on campuses, the present study will investigate where contact is happening successfully and unsuccessfully, in hopes of finding additional factors that may facilitate or hinder positive contact. It will also focus on programs that Chinese students have been involved in which attempted to facilitate interaction with Americans and their experiences with it. Friendships will be explored, including whether the Chinese students have American friendships, how they developed them, what makes a person a friend, what they like about their American friends, and what if any differences their American friends may have with their Chinese or international friendships. I will also investigate negative communication experiences Chinese students may have had with Americans, since negative experiences may lead to greater anxiety and closed attitudes toward outgroup members, particularly if they have perceived prejudice or discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, or communication ability.

### **Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)**

Communication accommodation theory (CAT), which was originally conceived to examine linguistic modifications in communication, also borrows from the principles of SIT to explain and predict communication between groups. Accommodation is defined as the altering of communication behaviors to reduce or magnify group distinctions. This altering takes the form of converging, diverging, or maintaining in reference to the other communicator (Giles, 2008). Convergence has been found to lead to better understanding, more positive feelings between interactants, solidarity between interactants (Gallois, Giles, Jones, Carigle, & Ota, 1995; Giles et al., 2007; Harwood, Soliz, & Lin, 2006). There are four ways that people alter their communication: (1) Approximation (which has to do with communication characteristics like language, speech rate, dialect, accent, volume, etc), (2) Interpersonal Control (which has to do

with whether someone interrupts the conversation, ends the conversation, or changes the topic); (3) Discourse Management (where one communicator chooses topics based on the conversational needs of the other); and (4) Interpretability (how communicators modify communication by changing their vocabulary, based on the others' perceived ability to understand) (Harwood et al., 2006).

Within an intercultural context, CAT helps explain how language use may have less to do with a failure to communicate clearly, and more to do with a desire to maintain group boundaries (Giles & Ogay, 2006). Because of the strength of intergroup competition, when minority groups converge toward majority group members, they may counter-intuitively be rated less highly by majority group members or majority members may over-accommodate in return, such as when a native English speaker slows down his or her speech more than necessary for a second language speaker (Jones, Gallois, Callan, & Barker, 1999; Tong, Hong, Lee, & Chiu, 1999). In intercultural interactions, interactants may base their accommodations on visual cues and stereotypes, which can also lead to ongoing negative effects as outlined by the Communicative Predicament of Aging (CPA) model (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986; Zhang & Hummert, 2001). In my study, CAT may be helpful to explain the responses of Chinese participants who have felt that Americans stereotyped them and adjusted their communication behaviors based off of those stereotypes, similar to how elderly individuals may feel caretakers stereotype and use patronizing speech with them (Hummert & Wiemann, 1994).

Investigating the ability of Native English speakers to adjust to *lingua franca* English speakers, Sweeney and Hua (2010) found that Native English speakers generally did not accommodate well. In fact, while Native English speakers may be well intentioned, the strategies they use, such as attempting to control jargon, may end up causing even more

misunderstanding (for example, lessening jargon may lead to over-direct or over simplistic utterances). Many Native English speakers did not understand what lingua franca speakers struggled with, yet those who did understand still struggled to make the relevant adjustments in practice.

Investigating code-switching among Hong Kong Chinese and Mainland Chinese in Hong Kong, Tong, Hong, Lee and Chiu (1999), found that Hong Kong Chinese students preferred Hong Kong speakers who either maintained their Cantonese speech when a Mainlander spoke Mandarin to them, or they preferred Hong Kong speakers who converged to the Mainlander by switching to Mandarin. They did not prefer or Mainlanders and Hong Kongers to speak Cantonese, the language of Hong Kong. These findings indicate that Hong Kongers desire to maintain their group distinctiveness and do not approve of Mainlanders attempts to integrate with them.

A study by Hornsey and Gallois (1998) aimed to differentiate the impact of ethnicity and nationality on intergroup perceptions and how communication strategies affect these perceptions. Anglo-Australian participants rated Chinese national speakers in terms of formality and appropriateness, as well as how willing they were to have future interaction with the speaker, based on whether they converged toward the Anglo-Australian or maintained their speech patterns. Similar to the study by Tong et al (1999), Hornsey and Gallois (1998) found that when Chinese nationals converged to Anglo-Australian speakers in terms of their Australian speech patterns, they were not judged as favorably in terms of status and appropriateness, which suggests that Anglo-Australians desire that Chinese speakers not adapt to their speech style, or that they perceive Chinese as a threat since they are a numerous group. However, when judging future intentions to communicate, there were no clear conclusions as participants that defined

themselves more in intergroup terms graded convergers more positively and participants that defined themselves more in interpersonal terms graded convergers more negatively.

CAT is relevant to this study since, in subtle ways, Americans or Chinese may use their communication to maintain group boundaries, improve communication, or unconsciously communicate stereotypes. While communicators on either side may be well-intended, variations in communication may lead Chinese to feel stereotyped, or in cases where Americans hold preexisting negative attitudes towards Chinese, attempts by Chinese to converge their communication behaviors may be seen as threat and thus result in resistant behavior from Americans.

### **The Developmental Model of Cultural Sensitivity (DMIS)**

Bennett's Developmental Model of Cultural Sensitivity (1986) is based upon the idea that in order for people to be effective communicating interculturally, they must be sensitive to notice cultural differences, and be willing to adjust their communicative behavior out of respect for the other culture. Bennett and colleagues (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) call the ability to notice cultural differences *intercultural sensitivity*, and the ability to think and act in culturally appropriate ways to be *intercultural competence*. They also believe that more intercultural sensitivity is related to the ability to perform competently in intercultural situations. So developing intercultural sensitivity is an important and necessary step toward becoming interculturally competent because one develops a greater ability to comprehend cultural differences in more and more complex ways. In order to better understand this process, Bennett (1986) developed a six-stage progression called the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The first three steps of the DMIS are considered to be "ethnocentric" orientations, which means that one's own culture is seen as central to reality. The first three



steps are called denial, defense, and minimization. Denial is where one's own culture is seen as the only real one and there is disinterest in cultural difference. Defense is where people are more able to note cultural differences, but still see their own culture as the best one, and cannot view other cultures outside of broad stereotypical categories; may divide the world into "us" and "them" categories. And finally, minimization is the stage in which people see everyone as the same, as if there really are no significant cultural differences and cultural difference is trivialized.

The final three steps of the DMIS are labeled as "ethnorelative," meaning that they are able to conceptualize their own culture in the context of other cultures. The three steps of ethnorelativism are acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Acceptance is the stage where people are able to see that other cultures are different from themselves (but are still members of the human race), and they become more skillful at noting how cultures differ; they may also see alternative views of reality as viable. Adaptation is where people gain an ability to perceive and behave in ways appropriate to another culture, empathize with individuals in another culture because they have internalized the assumptions and values that motivate culturally characteristic behavior, and include other cultural constructs in their worldview. Integration is the point at which people actually see themselves as marginalized and not completely central to any one culture (which can have negative and constructive forms). It is noted that integration is not necessarily superior to adaptation in terms of intercultural competence (Durocher, 2007; Hammer et al., 2003). Bennett notes that a person from any culture may experience ethnocentric or ethnorelativistic perspectives, therefore there is not a particular "American" or "Chinese" perspective (Bennett, 2004).

Focusing on how international students comprehended and processed diversity, Ritz (2010) found that while the participants experienced different amounts of multicultural

interaction, none showed signs of critically reflecting on their own assumptions (a characteristic of an ethnorelative position). Noting that these students may have primarily focused on their academic achievement, she believes the tendency of the participants to draw back from situations in which their values were challenged is likely due to the realization that they would be returning to their home cultural context rather than a lack of desire to engage. Some participants in the study remarked that they were indifferent to learning about other cultures, or that they had a hard time differentiating Westerners, both of which also reflect ethnocentric perspectives. It is noted by Ritz (2010), however, that about half of the participants struggled to express themselves in the English language, which may have impacted their ability both to process their experiences as well as to convey them to the researchers. While these findings are disheartening, Chambers (2007) found that for returned Peace Corps volunteers, significant transformations from their time abroad occurred years, or even decades after their actual overseas intercultural experiences.

In this study, the DMIS provides touchstones that may be used to evaluate the intercultural sensitivity of individuals with whom participants have positive, negative, and ideal communication. It is presumed that Chinese internationals will describe ethnorelative communicators when they describe positive interactions and ideal Americans. It is presumed that negative descriptions of communication with Americans will describe more ethnocentric individuals. Additionally, this research may shed light on how intercultural sensitivity may develop through intercultural interactions and how the the DMIS relates with acculturation and adaptation.

### **Literature Utilizing Grounded Approaches**

Identified by its focus on data and an inductive approach rather than prior hypotheses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the grounded approach focuses on the phenomena to be studied rather

than on developing existing theory. As such, grounded theory is used in many investigations of international students, including their overall satisfaction, and their perceptions of interactions with Americans.

Ward et al, (2005), in a survey of domestic students in New Zealand studied the perceptions of international students and intercultural interactions. Kiwi students were moderately positive toward internationals, and did not tend to perceive great barriers to interacting with internationals, yet reported few intercultural friendships and contact. The survey also showed that larger numbers of incoming international students resulted in a greater perception of threat and competition as well as stereotyping. Fewer than 50 percent of students indicated that they saw international students as representing an opportunity to learn about another culture.

In a project that considered the perspectives of 24 Irish students regarding intercultural contact, Dunne (2009) found that Irish students believed large groups of international students from one country created barriers to intercultural contact. The research also found that Irish and international students socialized in different contexts, which limited the contact that they had away from the academic environment. In terms of friendship development, Irish students tend to quickly develop networks of friends upon arrival at the university, during the time when international students were still getting oriented to the country or the university. In a sense, friendship opportunity was a window that closed very quickly for the Irish students, but had not yet even opened for most internationals. Along with this, Irish students reported that international students rarely participated in university-organized social activities. Irish students also noted that if allowed to do so, they tended to form monocultural groups, but that small, discussion-oriented classes and labs helped them to make intercultural contacts. Irish students

admitted that interacting interculturally led to anxious feelings, because it took extra effort and led to less satisfaction. When asked to make suggestions for improving intercultural interaction, Irish students suggested that greater institutional support was necessary, especially right from the beginning of university life. They also claimed that being forced to interact would be helpful, as voluntary action generally resulted in interacting with culturally similar individuals.

Lin's (2006) study focuses on social support needed for Chinese students in a smaller Midwestern American town. According to her findings, Chinese students' culture shock experiences related to: a lack of transportation, living expenses, the language barrier, difficulty in adapting to a new academic system, separation from family, poor cooking facilities, boring small town life, and political discrimination and were partly related to their specific context. Lin's (2006) findings concur with culture shock literature, that the for the sake of overcoming culture shock, Chinese students need the support of other Chinese nationals, and that there are a variety of ways this can be achieved, including through the Internet, through co-cultural campus groups, and through interpersonal interaction. This should not be overlooked when considering the opposing need for contact with host nationals.

Yuan (2011) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 Chinese students in the United States, and found that English is their biggest challenge in the classroom and that they generally look to countrymen for socialization purposes. Some students attended university sponsored events or engaged with host-family programs, but generally did not meet with them often. Generally, the Chinese students did not find it easy to make meaningful relationships with Americans, and noted the discomfort of interacting cross-culturally. The Chinese students noted the similar backgrounds made it easier for them to interact with other Chinese, and a failure to be able to chat with Americans about topics they find interesting. Some Chinese simply assumed that they

would not be able to communicate with Americans and therefore put forth little effort. All participants complained that Americans lacked an interest in learning about China and the Chinese people. In addition, even those who seemed interested or were more ready to communicate tended to have stereotypes of Chinese.

Regarding international students' perspectives on communicating with Americans, Lee and Rice (2007) conducted interviews with international students from 15 countries. Overall, the authors focused their interview protocol partially on directly investigating experiences of unfairness and discrimination that the students may have had. Although the authors admit that the perceptions of international students may be inaccurate due to misunderstanding the language or cultural contexts, they found that a range of responses indicated neo-racism as a cause of international students' problems. Specifically, students reported feelings of inferiority based on insults from individual or media portrayals; negative remarks about their home countries; feelings of discomfort and inhospitability; feelings of discomfort in classrooms where they felt ignored in the classroom or excluded by other students, especially if left out of study groups or social activities; unwelcome behavior from faculty due to their inferior English abilities; direct insults from professors; and even sexual and physical harassment.

### **Summary and Current Study**

I have found that social identity theory (SIT), Berry's Acculturation Model, intergroup contact theory, communication accommodation theory (CAT), and the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity are important explanatory frameworks for this study. Each of them clarifies an aspect of the international experience itself, the phenomenon of intercultural contact, or the dynamics of intercultural communication. Specific studies reviewed elucidate that in general, international students everywhere desire communication with host nationals, but that

host nationals, particularly students in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, are difficult for internationals - especially more ethnically distinct internationals such as Asians - to interact with. Customarily, the language gap is cited to be a key reason for this, however some studies note factors such as motivation, prejudices, institutional support, or openness to be more crucial. On the other hand, there is a somewhat murky picture of how Americans actually feel toward international students. There seems to be both a motivation and a cognizance of the need to learn from internationals mixed with an uncertainty about how to interact, a belief that internationals desire to simply stay in their own groups, and sometimes internationals may be a perceived threat. Culturally different ways of communicating and socializing present challenges to both sides, but can be successfully navigated. Chinese students in particular may be a challenge to Americans because there is a greater perceived difference between Americans and Chinese and because the high numbers of Chinese on many campuses may cause the Chinese students to stick with their conational friends more, and it may cause Americans to feel threatened.

In light of these assumptions, this study aims to investigate, through in-depth qualitative interviews, the actual communication experiences and perceptions of Chinese international students with and of Americans. The following research questions were adopted:

**Overarching Question:** How do Chinese international students perceive intercultural communication between Chinese and American students on U.S. university campuses?

**RQ1a:** How do Chinese international students acculturate and adapt to the American cultural environment?

**RQ1b:** How do Chinese international students develop friendships with Americans?

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The goal of this study is to investigate and elucidate the intercultural interaction and communication that is occurring on U.S. university campuses between Chinese international students and Americans; specifically to investigate the kinds of positive, negative, and other interaction experiences. This chapter outlines the rationale for using qualitative methods, describes the research context and the methodological plan of the research, explains the manner that interviewees were recruited and data collected, and describes how data was analyzed.

#### **The Rationale for Using a Qualitative Approach**

This study takes the form of a qualitative investigation because the research questions lend themselves to a qualitative research methodology. The research questions are broad, and are asking “how” and “what” questions, rather than “how much” or “how do these things relate” (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992). I looked in detail at what is happening, rather than trying to find statistically significant relationships (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). A strength of qualitative interviews lies in the process of discussing with interviewees their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, to find out *why* people do what they do (at least according to them) (Babbie, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In other words, I investigated what is happening and what participants think/feel about it (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Theoretically, this study is intended to extend and expand theory, but not to necessarily test it (Babbie, 2007).

I also am investigating how specific contexts (like personality, situation, relationship type) may influence different communication experiences, rather than treating all communication experiences as if they were the same. Therefore the semi-structured qualitative interview is an excellent tool, because it allows the researcher to follow up answers with clarifying questions, and to seek explanations or examples for statements as they are made. As it is an important time

to investigate interactions between Chinese and Americans, what Chinese students' attitudes are about these interactions, and how Chinese interpret the communication that takes place, the knowledge pay off of the qualitative method is high.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

This research also makes sense as a qualitative project because I have the resources to accomplish it. I lived in China for nearly a decade, during which time I studied and taught at a university. These experiences have equipped me in the Chinese language and culture so that I have been able to formulate and translate the interview protocol and analyze the data. In addition, I have a native Chinese advisor who is able to direct me and serve as a check.

### **The Research Context**

International students currently play a large role in colleges and universities in the United States. From 2000-2001 academic year to the 2010-2011 academic year, the number of international students in the United States has increased from 547,867 to 723,277 ("Open doors data," 2012). As of 2013, that number has increased to 819,644 ("Open doors data," 2013). This increase has caused the percent of foreign students to remain relatively constant along with the overall growth in higher education in the United States. Students from China, however, have accounted for a large percent of the increase over the last six years (from 67,723 in 2006-2007 to 157,558 in 2010-2011). During this period, China overtook India (which has remained fairly steady in terms of number of international student in the United States since 2001), as the country with the largest number of international students in the U.S. ("Open doors data," 2012).

According to Open Doors, the number of undergraduate Chinese students has increased in recent years, leading to a current breakdown of 36.2% undergraduate, 48.8% graduate students, 6.7% other, and 8.4% OPT (Optional Practical Training) ("Open doors data," 2012). Some U.S.



institutions have seen this increase in Chinese undergraduate enrollment skyrocket, in some cases leading to a surge of growth overall. For example the University of Kansas reports that Chinese international students remained fairly constant at around 200-300 students in the early 2000's, but in 2009, 676 students were enrolled, and in 2011, there were 865, the majority of this increase coming from undergraduate students (2011).

This increase in undergraduate Chinese international students in the U.S. has led to greater visibility of Chinese students on campus and in campus communities. Not only this, but because of a variety of factors, undergraduate Chinese students are somewhat different from past generations of Chinese students, who were mostly graduates. In addition to being younger, undergraduate Chinese students have less experience, may not have performed well in high school, and tend to have lower English levels (and may assume that they will be able to quickly learn English in an American environment). As opposed to funded yet “impoverished” (Lin, 2006) graduate students, undergraduates are likely to be self-funded or even to come from wealthy families.

This changing context is important because the volume, communicative ability, age, educational focus, and other factors, means that Chinese students are part of a shifting demographic. They are not the same as they were generations ago. The Chinese culture in China is changing, and the students who are coming to the United States are different as well. It is my belief that Chinese students, their American counterparts, as well as American university faculty, support staff, and administrators all need to mindfully consider the assumptions that they take into their intercultural encounters. Most likely, due to the factors above, the impressions that they may have had are not (or never were) accurate. Therefore, this study provides important insight into how this unique group of students is getting along in the American higher

education context.

### **Participants**

Thirty-three Mainland Chinese students, who have been in the United States for a range of durations, were recruited at the University of Kansas. All but two of them had been in the U.S. at least six months. The greater length of time ensures that the interviewees have had greater opportunities to interact with Americans in a variety of situations. The interviewees who have been in the U.S. the longest, have been here for several years. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 32, with the average being 23, and a standard deviation of 2.75. Four participants declined to reply to this question. Appendix 4 includes demographic details.

There are often differences between undergraduate and graduate students, which makes it important to note educational status as a factor. Besides age (and maturity that can be assumed to come along with it) which separates the two groups, undergraduate students from China often have had less stellar academic careers in high school, and may have had less say in their choice to come to the United States to study (Opportunities, 2013). Meanwhile, graduate students from China tend to have performed well in their previous university study, and may have taken a more active role in their choice to come to the U.S. For these reasons, approximately equal numbers of graduate and undergraduates as well as some participants from the Applied English Center (AEC) were recruited. The sample was approximately one half male and one half female. See

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment of participants was accomplished through word of mouth and the snowball sampling technique (Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2011), where initial participants were requested to share contacts or invite their friends to participate. \$10 gift cards were used as incentive gifts. I also received permission from the Applied English Center (AEC) to attend

select AEC classes to recruit students. The four AEC students were recruited in this manner. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, with the longest lasting for an hour and ten minutes, and the shortest interview lasting 33 minutes. Thirteen of the interviews were conducted in English, while 20 were conducted in Chinese.

### **Data collection procedures**

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), qualitative interviews are purposeful conversations, which continually evolve. They emphasize also that they are important tools for understanding people's worldviews. Interviews are also useful because they are flexible, iterative, and continuous because each time it is repeated, you refine it, which can lead to a clearer model of the phenomenon (Babbie, 2007).

Interviews are also useful because they allow the participants to tell their cultural stories as they are situated in the context, and also share their conceptions of their identity or how they are communicating about themselves and their world (Silverman, 2006). The accounts that people give are not simply reports of an external reality (Silverman, 2006), but are the participants' points of view about that reality (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The research questions of this study are concerned with exploring the perceptions and experiences of Chinese international students, and because their perceptions and re-tellings of what is happening in their communication with Americans is important, qualitative interviews are an ideal way to collect data.

Because rapport can be developed between the interviewer and interviewee, which can lead to the interviewee sharing more information, the interviewers in this study accommodated to the language preference of each interviewee. Because many Chinese students feel the most comfortable sharing intimate details and experiences using their native language, about two-

thirds of the interviews were conducted in Chinese and the remainder were conducted in English. For either language, the participants were given the choice to code-switch at any time. A native Chinese assistant was recruited and trained to conduct the Chinese interviews. The assistant is a fellow graduate student from Mainland China, in the School of Education. As a part of this training, she became aware of the type of data information I intended to elicit from interviewees as well as the research questions. However, she was not aware of the theoretical perspectives I used to inform my study. In order to avoid influencing the participants, I was not present in the Chinese interviews.

It was important to help participants know enough about me and my purposes to help them feel at ease and willing to open up, (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), therefore participants were first given some general information about the study and its purposes, without influencing the interview. At the start, participants were also be asked to create a “map” or diagram of the Americans that they interact with, which is a brainstorming technique devised to get them thinking about their relationships prior to the beginning of the interview. The interviewer gave a general example to the participants that demonstrated the possible contexts (e.g.: at the rec center, in the classroom, in the dorm, through a international friendship event, etc.)(Zhang & Hummert, 2001) and then invited participants to create their own.

The interviews were all based on an interview protocol that was refined over the course of six pilot interviews (see Appendix 2). Interviews began by asking a couple of “grand tour” questions, such as “Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?” and “how you decided to come to this university?” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Questions then moved on to specific inquiries about the participants’ interactions and perceptions of Chinese interactions, with Americans. The bulk of the questions focused on asking the participants to describe American people they interact

with, and the actual communications that they have with them. The questions also asked about interactions in general between Americans and Chinese internationals, and probed for both positive or negative examples; miscommunications between Chinese internationals and Americans; possible friendships with Americans; the types of things they do with Americans; and the most difficult things about communicating with Americans. Finally, the interviews concluded with a few questions about the future, including whether the participant was interested in working or interacting with Americans in the future, which was intended to gauge the overall positive or negative attitude toward interacting with Americans.

Originally, the focus of the interviews was on friendship building between Americans and Chinese internationals, however, over the course the pilot interviews, it became apparent that many respondents did not have adequate friendships to discuss. Therefore, the focus of the study was expanded to include friendship as well as all interactions between Americans and the Chinese participants. Further pilot interviews were conducted as interview training for the Chinese interviewer.

In addition to the qualitative interview, participants were also asked to complete a short questionnaire of mostly demographic information (see Appendix 3 and Appendix 5).

### **Data management procedures**

Before the interviews began, the interviewer informed the participants that they would be digitally recording the conversation, and that their participation was voluntary and that they may stop the interview at any point. All interviews were digitally recorded and saved on a secure hard drive to ensure the accuracy of the information (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Participants were required to read and sign an informed consent form, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board, before beginning any of the data collection.

## **Data Analysis**

Once data were collected, it was transcribed by native Chinese research assistants and then analyzed by the author via thematic analysis, a method for recognizing and analyzing patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Babbie notes that thematic analysis is a way of discovering patterns by looking for frequency, magnitude, structures, processes, causes, and consequences (Babbie, 2007). The six step process for thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke was followed (2006). First, I began by familiarizing myself with the data through repeated reading and immersion, thus generating an initial list of ideas of what was interesting. Next, I began to create categories by which I could begin to organize the data. These categories are like “bins” in which you can sort things that are similar. I began to identify “chunks” of data as belonging to certain categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). After that, I began to generate the initial codes, which are the most basic bit of the raw data that can be analyzed about the topic. These codes help to characterize the data in a category. Third, I searched for themes, or ways in which the long list of different codes fit together, which is a way to refocus the data set. Fourth, I reviewed and refined the themes by separating or combining them, making sure that the data in each theme held to a consistent form. During this process I used the qualitative analysis software, NVivo to sort and categorize the data. NVivo allowed me to easily code a statement to one or multiple categories by highlighting text and dragging it to a category, or creating a new category, and keep track of the categories electronically.

In this way, I created many categories of data. Over time, some of these categories collected many coded examples, while others had few. After primary coding, I went through each category individually to look for other patterns in the data. Some categories were split into new ones, or refined into sub-themes, while others may have been added together. Finally, I

defined and generated names for the themes, exported my themes to Microsoft Word files and then began to organize the different themes so that I could write them up (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Additional details and warnings were also heeded. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note that analysis begins at the time of creation, and that going back often to listen and read the transcripts is important to begin generating initial codes. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) agree that it is important to listen to the original recording while reading the transcript to be sure that important pauses or overlaps are included if they are important to the interview otherwise the meaning can be thrown off (2008). Silverman (2006) also warns against “anecdotalism” or attempting to fit data into an ideal conception of the phenomenon. Rather, it is important to allow the less dramatic but important data to emerge (Silverman, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) also note several common problems of thematic analysis to avoid. The researcher should avoid using the data collection questions as the themes, make sure the categories do not overlap, and be sure that the interpretations are consistent with the theoretical framework used to analyze it (2006). However, Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note that data may also contradict theory or bring two or more theories into tension.

After the data was analyzed and ready to be written up, I translated relevant excerpts, and asked a native Chinese assistant to help revise the translations. Suggestions were incorporated into the final translations. Appendix 4, which lists the participants and includes some personal data, indicates whether they conducted their interview in English or in Chinese. All participants were given pseudonyms. I have noted the respondents’ student status as UG = undergrad, and G = graduate. I have attempted to create translations that are accurate with the speaker’s original statements, and which capture the same depth of meaning in colloquial English. For the most part, I have put these into grammatically correct English sentences, while retaining the speakers’

pauses and circumlocutions. I have not altered the grammatical or wording from excerpts of interviews that were conducted in English. Although interviewees who participated using English do not express native-speaker perfection, they each felt comfortable and eager to convey their thoughts in English.

## **Summary**

This chapter overviewed the methodology that was followed in this project. I argue that qualitative interviews were a good methodological choice for data collections for this project because of the nature of the research questions and the context and goals of the study. I also overviewed the research context, the procedures I used to recruit participants, and how I collected and managed the data, as well as the thematic analysis procedures I followed.



## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter reviews the major themes and subthemes that analysis of the interviews with Chinese internationals yielded. The research questions were aimed at discovering the perspectives that Chinese international students have regarding their overall communication with Americans, their acculturation strategies, and their friendship development with Americans. The three primary themes are: cultural differences between Chinese and Americans, Chinese students' acculturation and adaptation strategies, and friendship building with Americans. The common thread weaving the themes together is that communicating with Americans is not natural or easy, and consequently results in most Chinese relating far more with other Chinese than with Americans. There are many reasons for this behavior, which are discussed. Despite the unfavorable overall evaluation of relations, there are several areas where interviewees revealed positive experiences and perceptions.

### **Culture and Cultural Differences**

Most respondents believe that culture is everywhere, and influences their communication, as overt references to culture bleed onto nearly every topic that respondents discuss, and sometimes becomes a default explanation, along with English abilities, for all and any problems communicating with Americans. When respondents dismiss culture as unimportant, it is with the belief that language is what is important, not realizing that the two are so intricately related.

While it may be assumed that respondents would perceive the cultural environment in the U.S. differently from that in China, it was important to examine the ways that they see American culture as different. Respondents, when queried about culture, interacting with Americans, or barriers to communication, naturally discussed what (and whether or not) they saw were important differences. In this section, I will highlight the things they discussed the most

significant cultural barriers and how it impacts their communication with Americans. Not surprisingly, English language issues were most prominent, as were nods to “a totally different culture” that they believe separates them and Americans. Besides language and culture generally, respondents note the lack of commonalities, American directness, nonverbal differences, the American university party scene, and humor differences, which are the biggest struggles.

**General Culture Differences.** When discussing culture, respondents sometimes made generalized statements about the cultural differences between themselves and Americans. These generalities usually were not clearly described or explained, and thus they have been coded into a separate category. General cultural differences include personality, “and culturally, most Chinese wouldn’t talk to people without anything in mind. Asians are more conservative compared to Americans” (Huang, G), being less outgoing, defining friendship differently, expectations about behavior (such as gift giving), different ways of thinking, and different educational systems. Many times, respondents simply mentioned the large cultural differences, or that American culture is “completely different” from Chinese culture; they did not or could not explain more fully. In addition to the categories listed above, the following is a roundup of the most common things that respondents note to be differences between Chinese and Americans.

**Table 1** *General Chinese and American Cultural Differences Noted by Respondents*

-Musical tastes
-Topics of conversation
-Jokes
-Hobbies
-Movies they like to watch
-Habits
-Interests

- A lack of similar cultural background to talk about the same things
- Expectations for roommates
- Ideas of what is fun

Despite this list of differences, it should be kept in mind that some respondents did not consider there to be significant cultural differences between Chinese and Americans, and as noted below, simply saw language as the main or only separating factor. However, in the course of the interviews, cultural misunderstandings and barriers were often noted, which can be seen in the following sections.

**Direct Versus Indirect Communication.** Although some respondents find it difficult to give examples of times when there were misunderstandings, conflicts, or negative feelings about the communication between themselves (or other Chinese) and Americans, two of the more common examples given involve a Chinese preference for indirect communication styles, and other nonverbal communication differences.

One of the ways that Edward T. Hall described cultures as varying is by the degree which communicators take into account contextual cues, thus crafting messages that are more or less overt and explicit in their verbal content (Hall, 1981). These differences he termed high- and low-context communication. High-context cultures are those where the environment and the communication contexts are taken for granted and highly attended to by communicators or internalized by the communicators, and thus messages tend to be less explicit and less direct. Communicators are expected to be able to obtain the meaning of less explicit verbal messages by gleaning information from the contexts. Low-context cultures on the other hand, tend to favor more direct and explicit verbal messages, and communicators are not necessarily expected to be able to interpret the meanings based on the contexts (Hall, 1981). All cultures include both high-

and low-context communication, however, cultures that are more interdependent, socially oriented, and collectivistic, tend to favor high-context communication, and individualistic, fragmented cultures like the American culture, tend to favor low-context communication (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Hall, 1981; Kim, Pan, & Park, 1998; Lustig & Koester, 2010). When respondents discuss these cultural differences, they normally refer to a preference for “indirect” communication, rather than high- or low-context communication.

Respondents noted that there were misunderstandings with Americans, and that they at times experienced a lack of desire to communicate with Americans, due to Americans’ lack of understanding of Chinese indirectness. Indirect communication is a valued skill in Chinese culture because it indicates that the communicator is sensitive to the circumstances and the other individuals, is able to convey or pick up meaning while avoiding embarrassing situations, and indicates insider status (Kim et al., 1998; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Mainstream American communication style however, is noted to be direct and open (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Kim et al., 1998; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Therefore, Americans sometimes did not understand what Chinese are trying to get at when they communicate in a high-context or indirect way, while at the same time, Chinese did not feel comfortable directly stating their feelings or needs, or with the direct communication style that Americans used with them.

Chinese respondents sometimes describe these sorts of high/low-context, or direct/indirect communication problems. If they wanted someone to do something, especially if it was something they felt awkward about or if it was something they considered to be impolite to ask directly, they hinted instead of asking directly. In their comments, they mentioned that Americans sometimes do not get it and then they can become confused. As Ke, a graduate student, related:

One time, it was like this. I think Chinese speak pretty indirectly, so sometimes for example, when you request something you want from someone, you express it indirectly, drop a hint or make a suggestion, and then hope that they'll get it. So my boyfriend, one time, I dropped a hint about something, and he didn't get it at all. He just thought I was narrating a story, not asking him to do something. So then after that I just, after that incident, I just told him "that day I was trying to give you a hint; I wanted you to do something, I wasn't just wanting to tell you something." He said, "Oh! I had no idea." So after that our conclusion was that, if I want him to do something, I need to directly tell him. After that I wouldn't use hints.

Also, respondents said that they may describe something or beat around the bush as a means of making their point, which can be confusing to the American.

Contrastingly, being used to indirect or high-context communication, respondents sometimes didn't know how to interpret Americans. This difference can be confusing, leaving a Chinese respondents wondering if the American is trying to get them to do something, may be dropping a hint, or trying to ask a favor. In a couple of examples from these interviews, an American asked a Chinese classmate about Chinese food and restaurants in town – the respondent came away wondering if the American was suggesting that they go out together to eat. The resulting confusion may lead to Chinese being more reserved or anxious because they aren't sure what Americans are signaling to them by their direct communication (Gudykunst, 2005a).

In addition, Chinese in these interviews felt uncomfortable with the directness of American communication, particularly the direct and open communication in education, and the debate styles of many classrooms, where they are expected to share opposing viewpoints and opinions, and back them up to prove their point. Respondents mentioned this debating as a

source of anxiety when it occurs outside of the classroom, among friends. Other subjects that led to discomfort for Chinese, is American college students' habit of open and direct conversations about sex.

**Hugging and Emotional Expression.** Related to the communication challenges that arise when someone from a more high-context culture enters a more low-context culture, several differences in nonverbal norms were noted during interviews. In general, these were differences in personal space and physical contact, differences in expression and appropriateness of expression, and volume level when speaking.

Regarding personal space, it was noted by a respondent that Chinese sometimes, "invade the personal space of Americans, because they don't realize the differences" (Wei, G), and misunderstand the procedures for standing in lines at a store (Yu, G). However, these differences were not considered to be major problems for Chinese to overcome.

More commonly, and perhaps more important when it comes to communicating, others noted that Chinese are less expressive in their communication than Americans. "I feel Chinese people seldom use body language and with less emotion. Maybe I'm happy but not show I'm smiling. Some of my American friends will show their feeling directly. It's a different" (Ding). This respondent, and others point to occasions where Americans interpret their cooler expressions as lacking the desire to interact, for example the following exchange where Peng, an undergraduate, explains how he helped an American understand that a less expressive style of relating is normal and doesn't express a lack of interest in relating:

I: OK, now just now you mentioned that person, he thought that this Chinese was very cold, he said he wouldn't say hello to him anymore after that, now why did he tell you about this situation?<sup>1</sup>

R: Because we are pretty close.

I: Hm. Ok, what sort of recommendation did you give him?

R: I said in China actually this is a way of greeting someone.

Unfortunately, not everyone has the opportunity to explain or realizes that their behavior may need interpreting, so assumptions based on American norms may cause some Americans to infer a lack of interest from Chinese students. For Chinese internationals, who come from a less expressive culture, they also may feel that Americans are unnecessarily animated and expressive of emotions and information (Bond, 1993).

Other respondents reacted to the nonverbal warmth and outgoingness of Americans by mentioning the American habit of hugging when they see people they are friendly with and explained that Chinese are “conservative” or “introverted” in their expression and thus not very comfortable with that form or expression.

So Americans communicate usually using a lot of body language. But for Chinese, body language is usually pretty little. Therefore, to give an example, you want to be pretty warm with Americans, when you see them give them a hug! Or say I missed you, and this is pretty Western culture, American culture, it isn't Chinese people's relatively introverted culture... (Hu)

Mainstream Chinese culture typically favors control and balance of emotions over overt expression, which may lead to a less immediate nonverbal communication style, manifested in less overt facial expression, more muted body gestures, and less demonstrative physical

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<sup>1</sup> I is used to abbreviate interviewer, while R is used to abbreviate respondent.

expression when greeting and/or leave taking for the sake of maintaining harmony (Bond, 1993). However, to say that nonverbal communication is not important in Chinese culture would be erroneous. On the contrary, cultures that are collectivistic and low in immediacy in some ways pay more careful attention to nonverbal behavior, even though they may be less expressive (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Chinese participants in my study noted that they are less warm, don't often like to, or may not feel comfortable with hugs, may not smile as much or show their happiness overtly, may not express interpersonal warmth such as saying, "I missed you," and in general may be more "introverted" or "conservative" than Americans. In addition, Chinese may miss subtle cues such as spacing differences that may be an adjustment in any intercultural experience. All of these things, while seemingly small, combine to add to a general feeling of uneasiness for Chinese when they were communicating with Americans.

**Partying.** An area where it seems that Americans and internationals would be able to mingle and enjoy each other is at parties. After all, if an American thought highly enough of an international student to invite them to a party, that should be positive. However, parties are another of the areas that Chinese internationals mentioned as a barrier, and sometimes even as a turn off toward American culture, communication, and friendships.

Respondents expressed that American parties or the culture of "partying" in the U.S. is quite different from what they are used to, even to the extent that it is a phenomenon that doesn't exist in China, at least not to the extent or degree of intensity it does in the U.S. For example, expressing concern over the wildness of American college parties, Ren an AEC student, said, "We don't 'party.' We eat together and chat. ... We have quiet. But here some parties are really



wild, so yeah.” Noting that “Americanized parties” are not a good place to meet Americans, Lin describes it thus:

R: Drinking, dancing, loud music. Some crazy stuff, I don’t know, I guess.

I: That’s different from a Chinese party?

R: Yeah, Chinese party is pretty calm. People have dinner together and then talk, have alcohol, but not much, talk a lot, laughter. Little games, poker, no big deal. Kind of boring. Depends on who’s there.

I: That would be a Chinese party?

R: Yeah, a Chinese party, some kind of festival or holiday, when you have no where to go, so we get together and invite friends, no matter they’re Japanese, Korean. It’s more casual, because people won’t be so restricted, serious.

Not only are American parties described as being too wild and crazy, at times, participants described the common Chinese perspective of them as being boring, not interesting, or even a block to communicating with Americans.

I: Are there places that hinder or block communication?

R: I’m going to give you a surprising answer – party. I think it has mixed effects. I mean really. From what I see, all of the Chinese friends that I’ve brought with me to American parties quickly came to the conclusion that it’s not fun.

R: Um, couple of reasons – play different games, like beer pong or cup flipping, are, are new to us but not that interesting overall. And then is this, how to say, um, language communication is a little hard for new Chinese in such environment. You basically start to make new friends, no longer talking about academics, you tend to make more jokes than serious conversation, and sometimes need to act a little silly to kind of be a part of

the atmosphere. However for new Chinese students, this is a kind of event deciding whether they like this or not. Specifically on party, but also in general whether I like American way or not. A lot of people overgeneralize this kind of emotion and feelings, if they came to a party and had a good experience, then they say ‘America is a heaven, I like it.’ But if you had a bad experience at a party, for Chinese, a lot of people, ‘I had a bad time at the party, so American party may not be what I like.’ Or even in a larger sense, ‘American way is not what I want.’ That sometimes I think, hinders the further involvement of a lot of other activities. People have pretty much said this is not what I want, it’s boring, people seem to have fun but I don’t feel that way. But again, this has a mixed effect, some people enjoy it, some don’t... (Guo, UG)

In this excerpt, the respondent noted that American parties are not the easy inroad into American relationships that they might seem. Instead, they require a Chinese student to engage with new (perhaps boring from their perspective) games, which may be intended more as a means of encouraging drunkenness than for any intrinsic fun, and may require her or him to act “a little silly,” which may be a tall order for someone just beginning to engage with the new culture, and feeling unsure of themselves. Hu, Grove, and Zhuang (Hu, Grove, & Zhuang, 2010) state that Chinese humility is at odds with American egocentric styles of partying. Guo continued:

I: So when you take a Chinese friend to an American party, what usually happens?”

R: They feel left alone. Um, they don’t find a way to start conversation. They don’t find the games interesting. They don’t find alcohol exciting. Um, I guess this way of socializing, through drinking, through joking, through dancing, is still kind of new to Chinese. When you look at how we socialize. We socialize through cooking together. Going out. Watching movies. Or play card games. These activities were very rare in

American parties. Usually it's just drinking, making new friends, talking to strangers, dancing. So that's what I find with many of my friends struggle with in American parties...

What this interviewee, echoed by others, described, relates to several issues. First, Chinese find the American university party atmosphere uninteresting: the games, the emphasis on drinking, and the need to do things that are socially daring, such as when encouraged to, "act a little silly," or "do crazy stuff." Chinese social activities were described in contrast, as being more interactive, with more game playing or social interaction, and with less focus on alcohol. Secondly, respondents pointed out that language difficulties may be magnified in the party atmosphere because talk is usually less academic, and more focused on humor. Compared with how they described Chinese parties (calmer, more personable, an easier place to get to know people and speak a new language, possibly), it is easy to see why Chinese may view American parties negatively. Finally, parties can act as a kind of fork in the road for Chinese regarding American culture generally. This presents a problem when it comes to encouraging interaction between Americans and Chinese because, at least for some Chinese, typical American college parties that include imbibing large quantities of alcohol, might be a good place to avoid. Respondent's comments also made it clear that in the case of parties, the problems may be on both sides. Yes, many Chinese could probably stand to be more open to new things. And yet who could blame them for feeling overwhelmed and turned off by anxiety inducing pressure, noise, and drama of an American college party? In the meantime, it may be helpful to warn new international students that American college parties might not be an ideal place to engage in communication with Americans, unless they are familiar and comfortable with the people and understand what will happen there.

**Humor Differences.** One of the common reasons that many Chinese cite that speaking with Americans is different than speaking with a Chinese is that they didn't understand American jokes and humor, or they got lost when there is humor involved. Zheng and Ren, both undergraduates, mention that humor is perhaps the hardest thing about communicating with Americas. Ren goes on to say, "I can imagine that if I don't get their jokes all the time, they will see me as a not humor person. So maybe they don't want to talk to me too much, yeah." Xie, an undergraduate, added, "you can't keep asking, 'what does this mean?' That's hard for me." Peng, an undergraduate, described missing American humor as an embarrassment, leaving him feeling as though he was left out of the situation.

Not only is this a commonly reported problem, it was noted that humor is an important part of developing a relationship beyond the classroom. One respondent expressed well the frustration of missing humor when he commented, "you're the one that caused the big laughter, and you're the one that didn't get it" (Guo, UG). His comment pointed not only to the cultural difference that may lead to a lack of connection or communication, but also expressed an emotional longing to be a part of the humor, especially when the laughter was somehow caused by a cultural or linguistic difference that it would be nice to know about. The study of humor in intercultural communication confirms the difficulty of getting humor in cross-cultural situations (Bell, 2007a, 2007b; Cheng, 2003).

**English Issues.** Finally, it is important to discuss the unanimously crucial challenge to communication with Americans - English language struggles. Language problems are a key theme in research on internationals, and is often found to cause a considerable amount of stress, particularly to Chinese students (Brown, 2008; Butcher & McGrath, 2004; Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sam, 2001; Tseng & Newton, 2002).

Respondents mentioned their fear of making mistakes, or that they didn't want to admit when they do not understand something, which can lead to more misunderstandings or problems.

As one respondent said:

In general we international students have a problem, say yes, nod to everything even though they don't understand. So if they keep doing that, even though when Americans say some stuff maybe not mean well, they probably going to laugh at the Chinese student, that be negative? I don't want to say they look down on us, but it happens, common stuff that happens. (Tian, UG)

Tian touched on several issues, but importantly, she noted the tendency of Chinese to agree and nod, rather than admit a misunderstanding. Even though this is seen as a language problem because the person does not have adequate English to understand what is being said or how to respond, it is also a cultural issue since it is assumed that nodding and agreeing will smooth things over or allow the Chinese to manage the situation. This does not work well in American culture and is a perfect case of assuming that a problem is purely linguistic, when in fact there are entwined cultural factors (Corbett, 2003).

A subtheme related to English, is that despite respondents' recognition of cultural differences, they often declared that language (ie: English ability), not culture is the real key. As Qiao, an undergraduate, commented, "maybe in America I feel, I just feel that, it seems cultural communication, besides the language, it seems there is no other problem." These thoughts were echoed by Ren, "So I think the biggest problem is language. As for culture, if the culture is totally different, we can still explain to others if we have ways to communicate. So basically its language." What some respondents seemed to not understand is that culture and language are not separable, or in the words of Roger, "language and the culture values, reactions, and

expectations of speakers of that language are subtly melded” (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Roger, 1989). While language is an extremely important aspect of adjustment for international students and should not be ignored, language cannot be divorced from culture. The two are intertwined, even though they may seem to be separate.

So while some respondents commented that the only significant barrier between Chinese and Americans was language, it is noted that language issues, which impact nearly all aspects of cultural differences, actually are cultural issues, as language and culture cannot be separated. The tendency for Chinese internationals to see them as separate issues is itself an important problem.

### **Summary of Cultural Differences**

In summary, Chinese international students often mentioned the cultural differences between their home culture and American culture. At times “cultural differences” can seem to be a convenient way of explaining why Chinese and Americans do not associate together more often and more closely. A list of general cultural differences that get mentioned is listed for reference, and this section describes the key areas that participants in this study describe with regards to the cultural differences that they notice in the United States. The major sub themes that respondents mentioned as cultural differences between them and Americans is the indirect versus direct (or high- and low-context) communication styles favored by Chinese and American culture, nonverbal differences, especially the outgoingness of Americans, contrasted with the more restrained expression of the Chinese, a lack of connection with, and enjoyment of the American party scene, differences in getting and engaging with American humor, and English language problems. For some respondents, they believed that language is the only true problem that they have, and that cultural differences would disappear if their

language were not a problem. While respondents may have other cultural struggles, these are the topics that they could most easily verbalize as cultural difficulties. The following sections will highlight respondents' perceptions of Americans, their ways of behaving in the American environment, their interactions with Americans, and their successes and failures doing so.

### **Acculturation and Adaptation Strategies**

Acculturation and adaptation has to do with the behavioral and psychological changes that accompany a person's submersion into a cultural context that is foreign. There was a near consensus among respondents regarding the acculturation behaviors of the majority of their countrymen, although there were a number of explanations for why they behave as they do. These behaviors can be summed up as separating themselves from Americans and clustering together with other Chinese. Most respondents also believed that these behaviors are negatively reinforcing in terms of the goals of gaining English proficiency, interacting interculturally, and developing positive relations with Americans and they are habits that are very difficult to break.

**Separation: Avoidance of Americans and clustering with Chinese.** Respondents consistently described their peers' behavior as the intentional avoiding of Americans, which results in primarily grouping together with other Chinese. One respondent stated directly, if a Chinese is around Americans, and other Chinese are around, then they won't speak with Americans. This was said to be because Chinese "prefer" to communicate with other Chinese. Sometimes this was clearly connected to issues of language (insufficiency or a lack of confidence) or culture. As Xiao, an undergraduate, said:

I think a lot of the time people don't want to communicate with Americans because they really prefer to communicate with Chinese. For example, if there is a Chinese beside you,

everyone can communicate freely, so he'd choose the Chinese, and this is the biggest problem.

Respondents pointed out that some Chinese frankly do not want to step out or encounter people who are different from themselves. As Rao, an undergraduate, explained, this type of person "... just really feels that staying together with other Chinese is much more relaxed. Its easier to communicate and more fun, so..." Others agreed, noting the many Chinese who live off campus with other Chinese, which leads to a situation where their only contact with Americans is the short time in class or working on a group project, while the majority of their time is spent with other Chinese, as if they'd never left China. She blankly stated, "Chinese basically prefer to be with each other."

Luo, an undergraduate, noted that there is a comfort zone, a circle, and that a lot of Chinese do not want to go out of it because it is comfortable to remain inside those boundaries where the norms are the same, the ways of thinking are the same, the interests are the same. Ren stated,

My roommate, she doesn't like to speak to non-Chinese. So every time when we go out together, like for shopping, or anything else, every time we have questions, she will ask me to ask the questions for her, so, um, because she is afraid of making mistakes and she thinks that people cannot understand her, so it will be faster to let me to ask the questions, and let me know the answer and tell her in Chinese.

This lack of interaction leads to being closed off to Americans and even more confined to communicating with Americans. Further, the lack of motivation to engage with Americans, or even avoid Americans for the sake of not having to engage with the culture or language, or other reasons, is a motivation which would be hard to overcome. In contrast to the motivations to earn



good grades, a desire to insulate oneself in the home cultural environment, while natural, can narrow future opportunities to encounter Americans.

This all can lead to an environment not that different from what Chinese might experience in China: speaking primarily Chinese, relaxing and doing things together, eating the food that they are accustomed to, etc., and only coming into occasional contact with Americans in class or through a group project. None of these behaviors is negative and all are a part of the social support that they need to maintain positive feelings of well-being (Berry, 1997, 2003, 2005; Tseng & Newton, 2002). However, when sojourning in a new cultural environment and these behaviors continually take precedent over the opportunities to get involved with the host culture and people, they can seriously impede the goals of positive acculturation, which requires frequent contact with host nationals. Asked why Chinese tend to stick together, Ke, a graduate student, replied, “I think it has to do with cultural background. You have a lot of the same sayings. But when you are talking with Americans, they tell jokes that you can’t follow because the cultural background is not the same.”

Some respondents noted that this is not just a problem with Chinese, but that Americans also tend to stick with their own in-groups and avoid outgroup members. However, Zhao, a graduate student, said that when Americans and Chinese do interact, it is the Americans who usually “take the lead in the conversation.” In Pan’s opinion, her Chinese friends, except for when they are forced, really will not speak with Americans at all.

In sum, Chinese typically stay in their group, may worry about safety, have a lack of understanding about their surroundings, feel more confident hanging out together, and thus often live off campus with other Chinese and only contact with Americans when they sit in class, or do a group project. According to some, most Chinese really like to stay together so that they don’t

have to speak with Americans much; they'd rather not deal with the cultural differences. In a "very short time" Cao, an undergraduate said, they develop circles of Chinese friends, and then they do not like to venture out from them, but feel comfortable and content relating within them.

**Reasons for separation: motivations and constraints.** Mixed together with descriptions of the cultural differences that Chinese international respondents report, are the responses that they perceive they and their peers make to the differences, and the reasons and explanations for the responses. These musings provided insight into the beliefs and perceptions that Chinese internationals have of their peers, and the process of becoming and being a successful international student, much of which may have been influenced by anecdotes on the Internet, educational training, or wider cultural assumptions. Prominent in the minds of respondents are issues of Chinese cultural characteristics and personality, the motivation to engage with Americans, and the clustering of Chinese with each other on and off campus.

While many respondents were quick to point out that *not all* Chinese behaved in these ways, most also agreed that the main stream of students come with certain attitudes and motivations, encounter the same types of problems, and have certain responses. This section will explore two emergent subthemes: motivations, and constraints that inhibit behavior.

**Motivation.** According to respondents, there are a few main motivations for Chinese international students: a desire to communicate and befriend Americans, a desire to more or less just fit in with other Chinese and enjoy their own company, and a desire to succeed academically. Motivation is deemed by intercultural communication competence scholars to be an essential aspect of IC competence (Deardorff, 2006) and respondents often agreed. The necessary desire to push beyond one's known and secure boundaries, overcoming anxiety and fear (Gudykunst, 2005b), in order to learn, and develop relationships is how positive motivation is described. The

excerpts and explanations that demonstrate how respondents perceive the importance of motivation, and what different types of motivation may exist.

Some respondents recognize how essential motivation is. Xiao, an undergraduate, claimed that she knows Chinese who really don't want to communicate with Americans. And Wei, a graduate student agreed, "What is the most difficult thing that keeps Chinese from interacting with Americans? Leaving their group! Willingness to leave their in-group." In both instances, respondents realize what scholars have found, one has to want to interact.

And yet, that initial desire to interact with and make relationships with Americans, for many Chinese is reported to be strong. They come to the U.S. naturally hoping and assuming that they will make friends with Americans. Guo, an undergraduate, stated that Chinese are initially "interested in Americans," there's "a period of curiosity" that may not last too long, but that almost all Chinese bring with them. Rao, an undergraduate, however, believed there are basically two kinds of Chinese, and that one of them really loves getting together and doing things with Americans. These people looked forward to coming to a different place and interacting with people who are different from themselves.

Motivation, though extremely important, is not considered to be the key ingredient for all respondents. Many of them believe that there are important individual constraints that work to not only hinder motivated students, but in some cases, seem to completely block them. The key constraints that respondents believe block them are language, personality, the large number of Chinese present, and the need for many to spend their first portion of their career in an applied English environment.

**Constraints.** Several subthemes from the interviews have been categorized as constraints, which work to inhibit communication with Americans. Some of these constraints have been

brought up directly by respondents and they believe they are related to their ultimate level of engagement with Americans, despite what may be good intentions or desires to communicate and interact more with Americans. The restraints are: language ability, personality, the high number of Chinese on campus, applied English programs, the need to achieve academically, and negative perceptions of and experiences with Americans. I also argue that a misunderstanding of culture and acculturation is another constraint. While these constraints are not necessarily new per se, respondents' rationale related to each of the restraints provides new insight into the intercultural and intergroup dynamics that are at work between Chinese and Americans and between Chinese and Chinese.

*Language.* The most common reason that respondents pointed to is the difficulty of achieving highly competent levels of English, and/or the resulting lack of confidence that accompanied poor English ability. This focus on language is consistent with other investigations into international students in English-speaking countries, particularly Asian international students (Jou & Fukada, 1997; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sam, 2001; Tseng & Newton, 2002). Interviewees mentioned that they often listened more and spoke less when interacting in English; others commented that they always had to slow down and be sure to understand things carefully. Many respondents also noted that the tendency they observed and/or experienced of avoiding communication with Americans and isolating themselves with other Chinese is actually due to real or perceived linguistic problems and a lack of confidence communicating with Americans in English.

In general I think most Chinese students may or may not want positively seeking communication with Americans and may fear making grammatical mistakes, lack of

confidence or lack of vocabulary to effectively communicate with Americans. (Huang, G)

The biggest hindrance to communicating with Americans, according to most respondents is English ability. For some, their English is fluent and they are already competent and confident speaking with English speakers when they arrive. Others, although they have studied English for years, may never have had a conversation with a native speaker and are forced to translate in their minds each time they try to use English, a slow and cumbersome process with awkward results. Many of the latter category are placed into a university's English training department or applied English center, until they are able to demonstrate sufficient English competence. However, each student progresses at a different rate: some who come with poor English are able to overcome it and prosper, while others have an extremely difficult time breaking negative habits and gaining the necessary competence and confidence.

However, a common belief that respondents mentioned was that using English with Americans naturally leads to improvement. As Rao, an undergraduate, stated, "its pretty relaxed, you just say whatever you think, and gradually you improve more and more." But once students spend some time in the U.S. and find that their English is not improving as quickly as they anticipated, they may become less likely step out and use it. Fan, a graduate student, explained that for many Chinese, they live fearfully. Asked to explain what they are afraid of she replied, "maybe they just afraid they can't express themselves clearly." What she doesn't say is that they may fear the negative reactions that they receive from Americans when they do not speak English that is easily understandable (Brown & Holloway, 2008). One respondent explained:

But as we continue our conversation, the number of things that we share become less and less the longer you talk to them. And again, we have different experience – listen to

different music, watch different actors, follow different tv channels. So that's the difficulty that I find – the number of topics. (Guo, UG).

This leads to a style of relating that Chinese call, *yǐ tīng wéi zhǔ* (以听为主): making listening the main focus (Gao, Ting-Toomey, & Gudykunst, 1996). This result exemplifies the attitude that many Chinese take to communication in the U.S. even if they can speak fairly well. They may fear censure from other Chinese, or making mistakes in front of Americans, or too quickly getting in above their heads... So they just listen. This is a very efficacious strategy in China, where you aren't as likely to be asked direct questions, and can afford to join conversations on your own time, when you feel comfortable. You may be left alone indefinitely, or simply accepted as a quiet person. Some Chinese are almost silent, even to their Chinese peers. But not everyone who chooses the listen first approach is introverted, they just may want to take time and let their English catch up. The problem is that Americans may quickly assume either that a silent Chinese isn't interested, or is unable to speak at all if they don't quickly join the conversation. As another respondent explained, she likes to quickly initiate with Americans in her classes to let them know she wants to reach out to them, and to let them know that she has the English skills to communicate (Tian, UG). This is actually a great strategy for Chinese to use to open lines of communication, but may seem very scary to many Chinese.

*Personality.* Both when they described what they see of other Chinese, and sometimes when they described their own interactions with Americans, Chinese respondents hovered around the issue of personal and cultural shyness. They often described Chinese culture and individuals as being more “conservative,” meaning that they are not accustomed to initiating conversation with strangers, or people outside of their close in-groups. In some cases, they were responding to the perceived shyness of Chinese (some deny and some confirm the perception),

but at any rate, many used it as an explanation for why Chinese are not outgoing and tend to stick together with each other. Some saw shyness as a deficiency and blame individuals, their upbringing as singletons, or the educational system. Regardless, it is clear that it is widely perceived that many Chinese are too shy, and if they are able to overcome that and be more outgoing with Americans, they will also be more successful in acquiring American friends, the English language, and American culture.

Descriptive terms that Chinese used to describe themselves or other Chinese were: shy, introverted, cold, not outgoing, passive, fearful, cowardly, restrained, timid, cheerless, quiet, and rule-abiding, and they sometimes made a point of noting that people in these categories aren't just shy with Americans, they don't really like communicating much with Chinese either. Some respondents though, said that there are many Chinese who absolutely would not speak out in an American class and others who say they would absolutely prefer to talk with Chinese than with Americans, given the opportunity. An interesting description of a shy Chinese was given by Qiao (UG):

I used to have a friend, a girl, she was one of those young 18 year-olds who left the country. But she was extremely introverted, very shy, considered in China to be one of those kids who is totally catered to by her parents and then rarely ever independently did anything at all, for example facing another person, so she really feared communicating with Americans. So right at the beginning the first year, we were both in the AEC studying language. So those classes, we didn't really need to speak too much. Because, well, mainly it was the teacher teaching, he developed an unobtrusive style, and the he wouldn't, force you to say something, or, well mainly it was primarily listening first. Therefore, then she went home, she'd go back to the dorm, and she totally adjusted to the

dorms and switched to a Chinese roommate. And then it was just everyday with her roommate or the other friends around her, her *laoxiang*<sup>2</sup>, just what we've been saying. Then it was eating together, going to class together, going out to shop window shop, whatever. In her whole life she basically didn't need to communicate with Americans. Chinese with these types of shy personalities were described as only interacting with an American or using English if an American interacts with them, or asks them a question. However, in some cases, respondents were indistinct when they described these issues, and may mixed English issues with personality and motivational issues. For example, Hu was talking about language being a block, but then explained that the problems she experienced with Americans were really due to her personality:

Sometimes they suddenly speak English with me, but sometimes I suddenly can't respond, I don't know what to say, and then I just, I just muddle through it, and then it is over. And then people just think that it must be my English is poor or else I just don't want to talk with them. It's probably due to my personality, then sometimes I just assume they are speaking Chinese to me, and then they suddenly speak to me, I'm like 'oh, what?' and all the more when they are speaking a foreign language.

It is almost as if "personality" were a catch-all term for respondents to use when looking for a reasonable explanation for some deficiencies. Since personality isn't something that can really be altered by this point in their life, perhaps it was a convenient excuse. Ye explains how even with many of Americans around her, she still wasn't able to initiate or respond much:

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<sup>2</sup> A *laoxiang* (老乡) is someone from one's hometown, home city, or home province, and who usually speaks a similar dialect. Chinese away from home, even in China, often like to make friends with *laoxiang*.



Before... last year, I lived at \_\_\_\_\_ Hall and there were a ton of American classmates, and then, and then, everyone... when you would see someone a lot you'd start to talk some, but ... maybe I'm just not very outgoing (chuckle), I think my oral speaking isn't very good, and I'm not very confident, which is really limiting. But it was a great opportunity.

Most respondents seemed to believe in Chinese shyness, but Fan, a graduate student, is one respondent who claims that although she used to be shy in China, by coming to the U.S. and engaging with American culture, she has become outgoing and extroverted. Luo, an undergraduate, also believes that all shy Chinese need is an extra push from Americans and then they will open up:

I wish my classmates just... just initiated with us... because I think Asians are pretty restrained, and if you don't lead them along by the hand, they'll just... they won't really talk and are pretty detached. But after they get warmed up I believe they can become very good friends (laugh). And then they become more outgoing.

So Chinese can be constrained by their shy personalities, but with outside help from Americans, the constraints are issues that some can overcome, but the individual may not be able to overcome their personality on their own.

In summary, personality is a very commonly mentioned aspect of Chinese international students' makeup that may hinder them with Americans. While some respondents comment that certainly not all Chinese are shy or introverted, others at least claim that most do carry this characteristic, which keeps them from freely engaging with Americans. Also, language ability (and the potential of developing it), personality, and outgoingness are all connected together for many respondents. Some express it as a sort of cycle or catch-22, where their shy personality

restrains them from being able to go out and interact, which hinders their language ability, and their embarrassment or shame about their poor language ability in turn causes them to be even less willing to go out and risk interacting. Despite this, many of them recognize that this is precisely what they need to do, both to improve their English ability, and to develop their relationships with Americans, and achieve their goals in the U.S.

*“Too Many” Chinese.* In addition to negative reactions from Americans, Chinese with poor English also fear embarrassment in front of other Chinese according to Rao, an undergraduate: “Maybe I’m in a group with all Americans except me, this set up is pretty relaxing for me, unlike if there were another Chinese. That might be embarrassing, feeling like my English still isn’t very good. There could be this sort of feeling.” This comment leads into the next constraint that often is mentioned, that there are “too many” Chinese.

There is a commonly expressed belief that there is an optimum number of Chinese for an American receiving university to have, and in many places there are too many Chinese, which negatively affects them. Respondents believed that the high numbers of Chinese on campuses currently can create fear in Americans, making them less willing to reach out to Chinese. Moreover, the biggest problem that they believe comes from so many Chinese is an overabundance of opportunities for Chinese to avoid Americans. As Guo, an undergraduate, stated, “in years past, there were so many fewer Chinese in the U.S.; that forced communication, otherwise you were left alone. Now it is so easy to find people who look like you, talk like you... So if you are unprepared for life here, you don’t really need to face up to it.” In spite of the fact that on some campuses, there were already many Chinese even twenty or thirty years ago, and that it is not necessary to have hundreds of home cultural peers in order to avoid Americans, the point is well taken. With the increases of international students from China, it is likely that

services both from universities themselves, and from Chinese initiated groups, are accommodating to Chinese, with the intention of making their landing on campus smoother. Although well intentioned, it is possible that these accommodations act as funnels for Chinese students, channeling them into relationships with other Chinese, and making it harder for them to connect with Americans. As Xiao, an undergraduate, mentioned, in former days you, “couldn’t not communicate with Americans, right!” She continued by saying, once those connections with other Chinese are made, “That feeling of cultural identification can’t be overcome,” and Chinese are going to continue with those relationships, rather than be pushed into communicating with Americans, like in former decades. Whether Xiao’s perspective about the past is correct or not, her point and others like it is that, many Chinese would be better off if they were forced to interact with Americans if there weren’t so many Chinese around. This is a widely held belief and desire: that if they were forced into more interaction with Americans, whether because Americans interacted with them more, or through circumstances, linguistic ability, along with better relations would be the positive result.

*Applied English programs.* Applied English programs are one of the necessary elements of international education in the United States. Nonetheless, respondents sometimes have negative attitudes toward this part of their experience and sometimes place the blame for negative outcomes. These attitudes seemed to be connected with the need to pay extra time and tuition for their English program, so there could be ulterior motives that respondents had in criticizing these programs. But applied English programs are a big part of many university’s outreach to international students and therefore are a factor that should be considered. One respondent in particular, expressed strong opinions about the validity of applied English

programs and believes that they may be a big constraint that works against the internationals who are required to study there.

The majority, well number one, I feel that, what, KU has one really bad policy, the double admittance policy. Because of that, therefore some students English is bad, and then, but they still all come. And then they study in the AEC, some study for several years, and there are a lot of this kind of student, but when their English is bad, if their English is bad when they first come to the U.S., then there is really no way for them, because even for their daily needs they can't communicate and that discourages them from approaching Americans. Because they are all pretty conceited, and they think if I say one sentence, they think if the English I speak is bad or an Americans doesn't understand or says "what?" then that will discourage them. Because I, I just think that this double admittance policy is really bad. Moreover, I think, I personally feel that, because when I first came, when I first got here, my English was at a 334, that's AEC Program level, because I was that kind. But I had relatively strong motivation, so I feel if you all come to the U.S. and your English is bad, you have to speak out, otherwise you'll never speak, you'll be bad forever! So I think I had thick skin, and I went up to Americans and talked, and then slowly, slowly raised my level, but the majority of Chinese, they don't. Well, a majority of Chinese people do not have that motivation...

(Hu, UG)

This contention that applied English programs are to blame for isolating Chinese internationals is somewhat ironic given that the intent of the programs is to prepare the students to engage with their peers and succeed in the academic and social environment. The Applied English Center website from the University of Kansas states that the goal of the center is to prepare students:

...for study in American universities and helping them participate in American society. We are committed to preparing our students linguistically, academically and culturally for university life, providing services to enhance their adjustment and achievement, and advocating for ESL and international students. ("Applied English Center, University of Kansas Homepage," 2014).

While the university's and the center's goals are admirable, Hu's claims should also be taken seriously. Her ideas make sense because she notices the lack of motivation that many Chinese have, and sees the separation and discouragement that tends to result. Her own strong motivation to move beyond the walls of the AEC helped her move beyond the Chinese circle.

However, despite what Hu says - that it is the programs which cause the separation of Chinese from Americans - evidence from universities which do not have applied English programs, gleaned from students who have not had to go through the programs still align with the above constraints and the behaviors discussed below (Lehto, Cai, Fu, & Chen, 2013). Moreover, Hu's assumption is that applied English programs should be closed so that students with lower levels of English would not be allowed to enter universities unprepared linguistically. This assumption overlooks the fact that people have been successfully transitioning into other cultures and linguistic environments with no prior ability or knowledge of the new language as long as borders have been crossed, and is still done successfully today. Learning the second language is a struggle, but should not be seen as a factor that separates automatically. In this sense, students who come to English speaking countries like the United States represent an oddity, since most of them have studied English extensively prior to arrival. This should be an advantage. In many cases, including many international students who go to China, people do not have linguistic ability or background in the new language, and are capable of being

successful. The key lies, as Hu does say, in being motivated. This leads us to the final constraint that respondents perceive, which also has to do with being motivated.

*The Need to achieve Academically.* Despite the fact that some respondents claim there are only two kinds of Chinese, other evidence and responses indicate that there are other motivations that are important as well. It is perhaps taken for granted that a primary motivation for international students is their educational goals, however what may not be as commonly known is that, they often are under intense pressure to succeed for the sake of their larger families.

With a somewhat negative tone toward her more academically focused peers, a respondent discussed what she sees happening:

The majority of the time they just study, you know? Get A's. Chinese people all want to get A's. Getting A's is what they will definitely spend their energy on. Moreover a lot of Chinese think, they all feel that early graduation is pretty awesome, you know what I mean? They all have that value. So they just think every semester 'I'll choose a lot of classes and then I'll get all A's,' they'll take all their energy and spend it on this plan, and there'll be no energy left to you know, get involved. Except for going to class - there would be no outside of class time to truly connect with Americans. But in class, how can you really communicate with Americans? Because you go to class and you listen to lecture, there really isn't much communication. Therefore, actually, all their energy is on studying, so they don't get involved. Because Chinese just, to put it plainly, I feel the majority of them are bookworms. And then, they can't, they just can't communicate with Americans. Who can communicate in class? (Hu)

This assessment that the “majority” of Chinese internationals fit into the category of bookworm is questionable. However, her assessment rings true, and other respondents confirm that studying is indeed a main focus, if not the focus for many Chinese. Ye, an AEC/undergraduate, told of her experiences which fit this model. She has taken the initiative to live with Americans, but explained that she always seemed to miss them:

I: Your roommate is?

R: Ah, two American girls.

I: Oh, do you communicate much with them?

R: Not really much, because usually when I get home... its just... our times aren't the same. Going to class, and then returning, they are resting. I come back pretty late, and then I get up before them, so, there's just the weekends where its more.

It would be hard to fault Ye, an undergraduate who was still part-time in the AEC, for working hard and studying most of the day, leaving early and coming home late. This is the pattern that most serious Chinese students in China follow. However, since her American roommates do not follow this pattern (and probably wonder what she is doing all day), she is effectively separating herself from them, even as she lives in their midst. At any rate, an excellent opportunity to interact with them is missed by focusing almost entirely on her schoolwork.

It would be foolish to blame Chinese internationals for “wanting to get A's,” without at the same time acknowledging that many Chinese are under intense pressure to succeed academically. Contrary to many American students, who may undertake their college education as a time to explore and “find themselves,” a great deal is often riding on the performance and outcome of international students (Brown, 2008; Butcher & McGrath, 2004; Fritz et al., 2008). This is certainly true for today's Chinese international students. Although many Chinese may come from wealthy families that can easily afford the high cost of international studies, there are

still many others who are relying on the sum of all their family's resources in order to make it (Arthur, 2004), with the belief that they will be able to help support their family later on. Moreover, a large majority of Chinese international students are singletons or only children, due to China's One Child Policy. For singletons, whether they are being counted on for financial success or not, they may be under significant pressure to achieve educationally and bring honor to their families (Fong, 2006). Therefore, focusing on studying, and blocking out other distractions may be a strategy that some Chinese have incorporated, but which may work against their intercultural adjustment. In the long run, failing to fully adapt to American culture, develop their communication skills, and make friends with Americans may greatly hinder their personal well-being, or their success as post graduation. However, for many students, using the intensive study skills that they honed as secondary students in China may be the natural *modus operandi*, comfortable to them, with proven results.

Yu, a graduate student's description of the anxiety that Chinese and other international students from developing countries often feel regarding academic performance and in general is enlightening in this regard:

...So for people from developing countries, they would, in general, they would have this sense of insecurity, in the sense of I would worry, what I would do if I lost my job, what I would do if something tragic happens. They would always have this thing at the back of their mind. But for Americans, I feel like most of them feel pretty comfortable – maybe most of them have a certain social safety net that could make sure that their life would not you know, go off the cliff if something happens, which doesn't really exist in countries like China or India. So if one of your family members got sick, it could happen that the whole family will just go broke... ...you always have this sense of insecurity at



the back of your mind. And so, certain behavior coming out of that... So for example, when I first came here, when I finished the final paper. There is a deadline: due date. I always finished the paper well before that, because I always worry you know what if something happens, what if I'll need to change the paper in a substantial way. And so I'd always finish well ahead of time. Which, Americans usually don't do, right. they only finish it on that due date (laugh).

Yu, a graduate student, framed her example in the context of coming from a developing country where there are lower levels of support in case something happens to her - there is no safety net there in her words - but her experience was also in the context of being a foreign student in the United States, and she compared herself to American students who seem to have little to worry about. Her typical anxiety that she might feel in China is heightened because she does not know what would happen to her here if something bad happened. This insight into what Chinese internationals may feel in the academic environment is in addition to intercultural anxiety, and may be another reason that interaction with Americans, or cultural adaptation is discounted as not being that important. In light of Yu's comments, the pressure to succeed is both a motivation and a constraint. She is motivated strongly to achieve in order to stay afloat and stay a step ahead of what she feels could be tragedy. Yet that motivation may constrain her from interacting more with Americans because of the competition for her limited time.

*Negative experiences with, and perceptions of Americans.* Another constraint that respondents were often reluctant to share about, was their negative experiences or those of their friends. Past research has shown that experiences of prejudice and discrimination can negate the effects of positive intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1997; Tropp, 2003; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005), thus it is important to consider these negative experiences.

Some respondents first replied that they had not had any negative experiences, while others said that they had but that they could not remember them. However, negative experiences were reported in classrooms, among roommates, from interactions with Americans that were “too” into Chinese or Asians, and with Americans who did not accommodate well. In some cases, prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory actions were reported which left them with very negative impressions. Such incidents were described by Luo, an undergraduate, who told of the tension at work where the supervisor favored the American student workers, and by Lu, who discussed classmates intentionally bypassing a Chinese friend when it was time to select groups in class, “so actually her classmates, bypassed her when it was time to select partners, she wasn’t someone who had great English, so they deliberately detoured her, they said she’d influence their grade. That’s how it was.”

While negative interactions both intra and interculturally are to be expected, negative intercultural experiences may lead some people to draw stereotypical conclusions and avoid further contact (Zhang & Hummert, 2001). Song, an undergraduate, described a friend who had a negative experience that may have turned her off toward Americans:

R: I originally, I had a friend who lived in the scholarship hall, so ah, so her roommate was pretty liberated, so, they were like that, she’s bring her boyfriend back to her room and then they’d have sex there. So (clearing throat) my friend, one day came back and walked straight in and saw them, and then afterwards she mentioned it to the RA, to the RA, she didn’t say anything directly with her roommate, she just said something to the RA. Then the girl said right out to her, ‘you came to America, you have to accept American culture, this is what American culture is.’ And so she just decided that this

American sexual culture is just too open, and that most American girls are basically sluts like this.

I: So this girl who said this, she (your friend) what reaction did she have?

R: She just said, OK, well since it's like this, I'll just move out. I don't have any way of accepting this culture of yours, so I'll just have to dodge it.

Other negative experiences were sometimes reported to have a similar outcome, although other respondents note that their negative experiences with Americans were simply an indication of their humanness, and that they were able to overcome it by slowly moving on and meeting other Americans who treated them well. Those who are not able to move on and gain this perspective may choose instead to simply avoid Americans.

*Culture & Acculturation: Quick and Easy.* Despite the common references, to the large cultural differences in the United States, as well as the recognition that Americans and Chinese tend to segregate and not communicate much, according to many respondents, adapting to the U.S. and to American culture was not a difficult or time-intensive process. Most commonly, statements regarding adapting to American culture came in response to the question of whether or not their closest American acquaintances were instrumental in helping them adapt, or whether they had had any blocks in communication due to cultural differences. A common response is stated succinctly by Cao, an undergraduate, who noted that by that time, "I already adapted a lot," and therefore had no real need to get help in adapting or acculturating from her friend. Another respondent, Huang, a graduate student, claimed, "First, I think I adapt very well, It's not been difficult. I didn't attend the orientation at all and I finish everything by myself." Li also said that she hadn't had any cultural problems with her friend because, "I am very adapted to

American culture.” And in response to whether she took part in any cultural training programs or activities to facilitate communication Zhao, a graduate student, said,

“No. I don’t have a lot of culture shock when I come here, so I don’t think I really need those.”

Song, an undergraduate, explained more fully her approach:

I: Have you had any communication blocks or misunderstandings due to cultural differences?

R: No.

I: None?

R: None. Because I’m sort of, I’m sort of not really someone to put too much focus on this big cultural background, I’m a very easy going and “fit in anywhere” kind of person.

Well, not “fit in anywhere,” more like I’m just someone who can adjust to new environments easily, so I think I basically haven’t had any of this kind of problem.

It could be that she really is a laid back person and therefore didn’t get into conflicts very often, but it could also be that there is more cultural confusion and lack of adapting that she was willing to admit, or even realized.

In light of this pattern, it seems that there are common assumptions about acculturation and adaptation - just as there may be about English - that just by being here, Chinese will “get” the American culture, will learn it, understand it, and be able to interact well with Americans. There’s also an assumption that acculturation is simply an initial “adjustment” period that they go through, sort of a “getting comfortable” period in the new environment like getting used to the time change, the water and food. In fact, in Chinese there is a saying, *shuǐ tǔ bù fú* (水土不服), which roughly translates to “acclimatizing oneself in a new environment,” but the literal translation is “feeling uncomfortable with water and soil.” It is this sort of acclimatizing period that many respondents seem to be referring to when they said, “I already adjusted.”

Intercultural research and theory however, notes that there should be a lengthy, ongoing time of trial and error, learning, questioning, comparing, testing, learning more, struggling with inconsistencies and incompatibilities in the new culture and the old (Berry, 1997, 2003, 2005; Hall, 1981; Zheng & Berry, 1991). The assumptions that respondents made may stem from several places. First, most Chinese today are very familiar with American media, to the point that American culture no longer seems mysterious or even interesting to them anymore (Weng, 2013). Secondly, while their functional English ability may not always be high, most Chinese have been studying English since they were very small, in most cases their entire educational career (Fong, 2006; Yajun, 2003). Although studying English formally may not lead to fluency, it does lead to a familiarity with English and through studying it, a perceived familiarity with the cultures of English speaking countries like the United States. This familiarity may equate to a belief that American culture is fairly accessible. Finally, the number of Chinese that are already living on most U.S. university campuses makes it very easy for new Chinese students to come in and connect with compatriots. The majority of Chinese student groups have introductory literature printed in Chinese, along with websites and social media devoted to helping new students learn the ropes in their new environment (Lin, 2006). While these things are certainly helpful in the sense that they allow Chinese to understand things quickly, it might be a negative for their cultural learning since it may strengthen the false sense of ease with American culture, and it may establish other Chinese as the source for information, rather than forcing new Chinese to make connections with Americans and turn to them for help.

When respondents did refer to learning about American culture, it tended to be with “above the surface type of things,” or in other words, observable cultural phenomena such as learning about football rules or drinking beer. One respondent noted that she often asked her

friend about, “American culture” and that her friend “will give her some advice. Like she told me where I can buy cheaper textbooks...” Since these are the sort of ideas that some Chinese internationals have about “American culture,” then it is no wonder that it didn’t take them long to adjust.

Perhaps partly due to the separation from Americans, instead of using the resources like roommates, classmates, professors, etc., many students simply tried to understand things in the U.S., including American culture, on their own. Respondents commonly reported things like, “No, I don’t ask questions about it,” when asked if they talked to their American friends and acquaintances about cultural or communication problems. Said Lu when asked if she asked her American friends to help her know what is appropriate in certain situations, “No.”

Why not?”

“I can’t express it. I usually just mull things over in my mind on my own (laugh)...”

Discussing another example, Lu noticed a strange cultural thing, but again doesn’t ask her friend what was happening. If she were to ask about things, it would probably help her gain more insight:

I: Now do you think this person has helped you to adjust to American culture?

R: Yes. For example, one time I went with him out to eat, and he brought his wife. Then I noticed that they each went Dutch, no that’s not it, but they each paid in turn, they take turns paying. That time he paid and he asked her: “just now did I pay? Just now when I bought such and such, did I pay?” His wife immediately took initiative and paid for them.

Then I thought, “Huh? American husbands and wives do it like this?”

Another undergraduate respondent, Xiao explained how she likes to “indirectly” learn: “they haven’t directly helped me, but indirectly! Through talking, I understand what a lot of their attitudes are towards things; my thinking, and the differences between their thinking and

mine. So afterwards I'll be talking with a stranger and can understand a lot quicker what he will be thinking."

Asians may see this indirect method as the best way to learn, most culturally appropriate for them, and also least embarrassing, and it is certainly a good strategy for gathering interesting tidbits, but it may not be the best for actually getting to know Americans on a deeper level since we tend to interpret strange phenomena through our own cultural assumptions unless these are actively challenged (Bennett, 2004). Rather, since they are looking primarily at exteriors, it could cause them to stereotype Americans more.

Of course it is great that some people are thinking about things and mulling over the cultural differences. But relying on one's ability to interpret properly a foreign culture is a recipe for misunderstanding. And it is unnecessary, since there are Americans all over to ask. The reasoning for not asking may be once again, that the real problem with communicating with Americans is seen as being linguistic. Thus, insecurity about interacting in English hinders from learning.

Results from the survey that participants filled out prior to these interviews shows (see Appendix 5) that many respondents have sought to figure things out on their own, if indeed they thought much about culture at all. Most seem only somewhat committed to intercultural communication as they have not continued living with Americans or other internationals besides Chinese after the first year in the U.S. Beyond this, the survey indicates that respondents rarely read books about American culture or intercultural communication, and few have taken part in the extra training offered at the university which may have helped them better understand Americans. In fact, only about half of the respondents indicated that they have discussed questions they have had about culture with other internationals! This may be the most surprising

finding from the survey. It is small sample, but it may indicate that understanding American culture is just not a big topic on the minds of most Chinese, in spite of the fact that there are such large cultural gaps, and anxiety is fairly high about communicating with Americans. This contradiction between what respondents say they believe about cultural differences and their efforts to adapt is confounding. The effect may be to actually increase the cultural differences as Chinese may feel they have done what they need to adapt (while actually they have done little), and yet huge differences remain.

**Cycles of Separation.** There are a host of constraints that may motivate or influence Chinese internationals to choose separation. But according to respondents, this is not the only problem. They go on to explain that separation behaviors are cyclical, reinforcing the need to engage in them. This is largely due to two factors: failure to develop adequate English abilities (and get over the initial fears of speaking English with Americans), and a failure to develop relationships with Americans, thus stranding Chinese with other Chinese. One respondent explained how he sees the cycle:

So the first stage I see is Chinese are interested in Americans, and vice versa. A period of curiosity. Especially in Kansas, not a lot of people have seen people with yellow skin. And same for Chinese, there are a lot of people of different colors than China. However this period fades away very quickly. If you cannot even introduce yourself, get the jokes, make yourself clear – this period of curiosity quickly fades away. Second period, where to go – try harder to communicate with Americans, or pick the easier way which is there are tons of Chinese available, so this period many people make different choices, I don't think there's a right or wrong, but people make choices, and after that enters what I call a cycle – if you choose to be with Americans more, you start making friends, you improve



your English, you make more friends. However if you choose to stay with Chinese, they tend to stick together, study together play together and eventually you don't find the need of speaking English outside of class. People take different paths of communicating. (Guo, UG)

As he explained, it is also believed by respondents that there is an initial period in the beginning of one's sojourn in which the time is ripe to connect with Americans, and once that time is passed, the opportunities are somehow missed and one is more or less permanently separated from Americans. This may be due to the choices made to live off campus with other Chinese, thus isolating themselves from American company. Luo, also an undergraduate, explained more:

If you often stay with Chinese or want to just be with Chinese... that can just limit you. Because slowly, now I'm not saying it isn't fun to be with other Chinese, it's great, everyone has the same background. But the longer you hang out and play with them the more you start to feel that this is the best situation. There's no pressure to have to be with foreigners and speak English, communicate, you just feel indifferent and don't have that impetus to go communicate with others.

This description of feeling content and lacking of motivation to go beyond one's Chinese circles may stand as a warning to Chinese who do have a high motivation to connect with Americans and meet their educational and acculturation goals.

Another common motif is that if there are serious English problems in the beginning of a certain individual's sojourn, then they may give up right there, which may create a cycle of spending time with other Chinese rather than Americans, which may lead to further hindrances to improving their English. This cycle is expressed by Guo and reinforced by the comments of many others, "if you choose to be with Americans more, you start making friends, you improve

your English, you make more friends. However if you choose to stay with Chinese, they tend to stick together, study together play together and eventually you don't find the need of speaking English outside of class. People take different paths of communicating." This cycle is another dilemma; those with inadequate English abilities don't feel comfortable interacting with Americans, and thus turn to spending more time with Chinese, where they have even less opportunity to improve their English. Again, the link respondents made between language, culture and personality is prominent in this cycle.

### **Summary of Separation**

As has been shown, many respondents see language as the "true" barrier to communication with Americans, and they discount culture, which could be why there seemed to be a fairly low commitment to learning and investigating culture. Here again were some of the common responses to this issue. "What, either from your experience, or from your observation of others, are the most difficult things in interacting with Americans?" "Aside from language? Language is the biggest" (Zhao, G). And Pan agreed, "I think it is still language. It's definitely related to language. I don't think it is culture. The cultural differences aren't hindering you from doing anything, but it's by language that you communicate." Ke, a graduate student, wasn't sure however,

Umm, I think it may be language related, not necessarily related to cultural background, but it could be. Sometimes I say to him, 'the reason why I'm saying this to you is because I come from a traditional Chinese background,' I have to do my best to explain that. But up till now I haven't had (cultural) misunderstandings, but there have definitely been some communication difficulties. I really have to explain some things. Because I realize our cultural background is different...

For Fu, a graduate student, language was the first biggest problem and culture was seen only a secondary problem, “Number one is language, and then the second is not understanding the culture of the other person. ...Maybe its just toward American... maybe at that time you just think, you think actually, it seems like cultural communication, besides the language barrier, there doesn’t seem to be any other problems.” Fan, a graduate student, however, demonstrated that what she believed is a language issue may actually be more cultural than she thought. Moreover, her cultural understanding may have been framed largely by her media consumption in China rather than her acculturation in the U.S.:

To me, it’s language barriers. To me it’s not culture difference. Since China... many young people saw American dramas and can understand American cultures deeply. Even before I came here, I have a friend in China who is really interested in American cultures. Most of American movies and dramas she saw, and she is my roommate in China, so I get familiar with American cultures even before I’m here. ...To me language barriers is the most difficult part. If I can understand the jokes and can speak as fluent as the native English speakers, I will feel no difficulties, but maybe even if that happens there are new difficulties that I don’t know.

Of course, language is huge, but some respondents seemed to negate the role of culture. Most Chinese have been trained to see language as simply fluency, grammar, and vocabulary (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005; Yajun, 2003), so they may really be missing out on understanding how internalizing a new culture is essential to developing linguistic competence (for example with humor).

Interestingly, no respondents claimed that Americans were directly to blame for the separation style. The fact that Americans are not highly accepting, or easy to befriend can be

inferred from the constraints that have been discussed, but American attitudes are not noted to be a constraint by themselves. Therefore, it seems that Americans are at least moderately open to Chinese and interacting with them, at least if the other barriers are overcome by the Chinese.

### **Seeking American Contact**

The previous explanations of the most common responses regarding the behavior, motivations, and beliefs of Chinese internationals - while the most common - do not represent the full spectrum of respondents' comments and opinions regarding themselves or their countrymen. Many respondents were careful to point out that although many, even most, Chinese internationals followed the common patterns, there are other personalities, styles of relating, and success stories that they personally represent and/or know of. Not all of the other behaviors and explanations that are discussed are positive per se, but they represent a marked contrast from the separation style of acculturating, by seeking interactions with Americans.

Respondents often separated Chinese internationals into two groups, those that like to communicate more with other Chinese and those that desire to learn about something new. Huang, a graduate student, explained, "On the other hand, some Chinese students may actively seek communication with Americans to strengthen their communication skills and learn more about American cultures and make friends with Americans. Some people are different, have different opinions or attitudes of communication. So that's my general impression." This section investigates the descriptions of these more outgoing and initiating behaviors, and focuses on the two main acculturative strategies and behaviors of these "other" Chinese, specifically the style of assimilating to American culture by seeking nearly 100% contact with Americans, and the style of integration, which describes the effort to seek to establish a bicultural identity, with strong ties

to both the home culture and community, and the new or host culture and community (Berry, 1997).

**Reasons for seeking contact.** Why do respondents believe that some Chinese initiate more than others? What reasons do they give for this key difference? As Rao, an undergraduate, hinted at, “before they leave their country they want to go a different environment and make different kinds of friends, with a different culture,” there are usually two things mentioned as key: personality and motivation. These two factors are naturally the opposite of two of the key constraints that affect the majority of Chinese and influence them to choose separation. These two key positive factors are believed to be important enough to overcome the constraints.

**Personality.** While some respondents used blanket statements to describe Chinese behavior and personality, others clarified or even adamantly deny that Chinese are necessarily not outgoing, introverted, or shy. Ren explained that she is an outgoing person, “I’m the kind of person that I like to talk with strangers. So I think I communicate with Americans more than my friends. Because they don’t like... They’re a little shy.” Guo, an undergraduate, also talked about himself being more outgoing: “my one advantage is that I’m good at starting with small topics, starting with a small joke that we can all understand. What kind of shoes you’re wearing, a recent event... some recently acquired information. I’m good at that.” These respondents all commented that they or others have some necessary characteristics: bravery, interpersonal skill, or outgoing, attractive personalities, that help them initiate with Americans and get the ball rolling rather than waiting on Americans to initiate with them, or to help engage with Americans.

While some respondents simply stated that there are basically two kinds of Chinese, others believed that Asians are merely stereotyped as shy or introverted, even if they may agree that there seems to be a cultural tendency toward being less outgoing, at least compared to

Americans. Cao, an undergraduate, cautioned against stereotyping since not all Chinese are that way:

to tell the truth, I think this is something you can't generalize about since everyone is different. Because someone like me, I am an outgoing type, and some people no matter the circumstances, they manage to tap their potential. But some people, no matter how many opportunities you give them, they still won't take them...

So while many Chinese are considered to be shy and less outgoing, some respondents are careful to point out that not only is this not always true, but that it can be a stereotype which could lead others to make assumptions about Chinese. It also seems that the stereotype of Asians and Chinese being shy is perpetuated by many Chinese themselves, perhaps finding personality or an inherent introversion to be a convenient explanation for the clustering and separating tendencies of the majority. But this belief is challenged by a few.

***Motivation.*** While having a personality that makes engaging with Americans more natural, another even more important reason that some Chinese are able to break out and communicate often and successfully with Americans, is strong, positive motivation. While not the majority, several respondents responded affirmatively when probed for examples of students who were proactive and outgoing in their attempts to connect with Americans and adapt to American culture. “There are another type,” said Deng, “they really want to pick up their oral English quickly, so they do a better job of merging into their lives or culture. Then these people are pretty proactive and initiating with Americans.” These Chinese were described as having: courage, thick skin, being more interested in or committed to seeking Americans, having better English, or as being into Americans and American culture. Song, an undergraduate’s description of this motivation was that it has to come from one’s bones:

One kind of person has that innate, no not innate, they just have it in their bones to want to get out and communicate with Americans, so they are just really brave to go out and speak; even if they speak badly they still speak... But some people, for example some of my friends, they just don't have that desire in their bones, they don't really want to go out and interact with Americans because they think this cultural gap is so big or something. They aren't necessarily hostile, they communicate when they have to, but normally they just communicate with other Chinese, and thus can't initiate communication with Americans like that.

So those who are able to make sustained, positive contact with Americans have to have a drive within them to do it. As Song, an undergraduate, noted, you can't be antagonistic to Americans, you have to want to go out and communicate with them.

Strong motivation is especially important because not every encounter with Americans is going to be positive. Certainly, in interacting with a broad swath of Americans, an international student will run into Americans who hold inflexible negative stereotypes, are prejudiced, or who discriminate (all of which were noted in interviews). A negative experience at first could stop a less motivated student from continuing on. But interaction-seeking respondents, who have more experiences with Americans, tended to realize that Americans are more than either the positive or negative stereotypes, and are able to express the complexity that they have noticed.

As personality and motivation are singled out as the key factors that are necessary to engage successfully, it is interesting to note that these two things are able, in the minds of respondents, to overcome the other constraints. In other words, while there are several constraints, there are only two positive factors that can overcome those constraints. Most notably, although English ability is almost universally hailed as the most difficult thing in

communicating with Americans, no respondents claimed that achieving great English was the key to theirs or others' success. This may be because it isn't necessarily the English ability per se which is key, but rather the bold motivation and thick-skinned personality to use and keep on using one's English. The result is slow improvement over time, which many respondents did note.

***Positive experiences with Americans.*** Respondents in this study were encouraged to share positive as well as negative experiences that they had with Americans. Not all of the descriptions fit clearly under the above headings, yet still may provide additional examples of what has worked for them, while seeking to connect with Americans or understand American culture better. Overall, Chinese participants have had success learning and adapting to American culture by going to church, through English programs (both the formal applied English programs and informal English/culture classes taught off campus), and using technology together with Americans to communicate, such as texting or Facebook. This section explores a few other larger categories: being a teaching assistant, finding a trusted person to ask questions to, American families and homestays, roommates, and cooking together.

Several graduate student respondents noted that teaching in American classrooms was helpful in their adaptation. For the most part, their experiences seemed positive, and several mentioned needing to learn about things that American students were interested in in order to add cultural references to their lectures. This in itself was a cultural adaptation as some of them did not seem to think it should be necessary to cater to students in this way, but not only did they do it, but they also indicated they connected better with their students through this process. One respondent, Yu, a graduate student, discussed having to argue about a grade with an American student and the learning process that entailed. She ended by saying, "During the first semester,



when I was a GTA, I didn't know any of that, right, those small techniques, the tones, like the words that should be used when you are communicating with students, just to let them know that you will not be pushed further (giggle).” While she did not necessarily gain a friend through this experience, she definitely adapted to American culture.

Whether they are necessarily a friend or not, many respondents mentioned confidants and helpers that they could ask questions of if they were confused or needed help. In several cases, these were older Americans who were described as being very nice, patient, and helpful, but perhaps were also less threatening. It seems that it is very important to have someone to ask these questions to without fear of censure since cultural contexts and sensitive linguistic conventions can make asking questions a face threatening act at times. Topics that respondents mentioned asking confidants about were: the presidential election process, religion, and questions regarding contextual meanings. One respondent, Huang, a graduate student, mentioned asking an appropriateness question, “another interesting question I ask him, ‘is it appropriate if I ask other Americans the question...’” This sort of question is a helpful one to be able to ask, since it relates to understanding what is appropriate or not in society. If one realizes some of the key taboo topics or potential potholes surrounding topics, then it is easier to relate with others more confidently. So finding these confidants who can handle and understand sensitive questions are important.

Homestays and other experiences with American families were regularly considered to be the most positive experiences for respondents, while they occasionally told of having had negative incidents. Respondents noticed the different ways that parents interact with their small and adult children, enjoy partaking of family meals, and the general situation of American families. Some respondents remembered feeling awkward, or even felt they somehow hurt the

feelings of their hosts when they experienced homestays early on in their sojourn when their English was still poor. Yet, they could see the experience as a positive learning one:

My first host family, they really, they really helped me understand how to adapt to American culture... ..the mother was very direct. That host family mother was really direct, she'd give me a detailed list, she'd post it on the outside of my door, it said what to do with what thing, collect your bed sheets and put them in a certain room, and then give them to, put them in the washing machine. So these things, every time I've been to a host family, I know, I want to help everyone out with things, and just be more active. I don't want to always just watch TV or whatever in other people's homes. And just be considerate, be more considerate. Like taking the bed sheets and take them and collect the bed sheets and stuff, be more conscious of myself (Hu, UG)

This excerpt illustrates how someone, although she struggled with her English and was surprised by the directness of the host mother, benefitted personally from the experience and has incorporated a more mature posture toward her ensuing encounters. While homestay experiences do not usually comprise a large proportion of international students' time in the United States, they are intensive experiences, which allow them to observe and experience American culture, and develop off-campus relationships that they might not have otherwise. As the example above indicates, even somewhat negative experiences may provide long-term benefits to the student.

Similarly, experiences with American roommates were not always completely positive experiences. For the most part, however, American roommates and experiences with them were considered very positive and friendly. To begin with, sharing a dwelling provides a lower stress environment for communicating with and getting to know Americans, compared with the stress

and pressure of communicating in a public setting. Normally, roommates both put forward effort to understand and get to know the other. Because there were usually only one or two roommates, they provide an inviting setting for communication. Having an American roommate also naturally creates a connection that overlaps many different contexts: cafeteria, campus, and dorm. Multiple connection points is also considered to be important to friendship development. Ma described how roommates can be:

Or if two people are roommates, of course there are roommates with cold relationships, but you also have some really good ones, so... first you have to have a platform to let people connect. After connecting, if they have compatible personalities, interests and hobbies, if they can talk, they can develop deep understanding, and then, uh, they'll do more stuff together. That's how they are.

As Ma inferred, roommates have the benefit of extended time in a non-structured environment. This non-structured time, watching television, discussing sports, eating meals, chatting is exactly the kind of linguistic and cultural input that is lacking in the academic environment and which gets omitted when Chinese choose to live together off-campus. While rapport and trust do not necessarily develop between two roommates, in some cases the respondent mentions (Hu, Pan, Luo) making good friends with the nearby American neighbors.

One of the activities that respondents mentioned the most, and which seems to provide an important cultural touchstone between them and Americans is cooking. Cooking provides chances to talk about something everyone is interested in, provides Chinese the platform to discuss and demonstrate their own culture, ask questions regarding American culture, and allows both sides to learn something new from the other, even if the food is as simple as brownies. While at least one respondent expressed that American food was not as rich and various as

Chinese cuisine, she still expressed that the platform provided by the kitchen enabled her to learn names and types of foods and how to prepare them. Wang, a graduate student's description explains how the experience of cooking together complimented the discussion of food:

Usually they say the names of different foods, and I don't know. But they make them, all sorts of different things, and I know what this is and what that is. All different kinds of cookies, and so many ingredients. For example she made all sorts of exotic pastas, it was all Italian names and whatnot. She told me what everything was (laugh), but I still can't remember the names clearly, can't remember the names too clearly since it was hard to understand.

While she still admits to being confused about the names of things, Wang's description of the act of learning is a great example of how cooking together builds not only vocabulary, but also relationships. She as well as other respondents often took turns cooking for their respective roommates or down-the-hall dorm mates. This provides for a mutual exchange of culture, language, and service.

**2 Main outcomes of seeking interaction: integration & assimilation.** As Berry theorized and subsequent research has confirmed (Berry, 1997, 2003, 2005), a high degree of concern for interacting with and learning the new culture leads to two acculturation styles, depending on how much an individual remains connected with, and desires to maintain connections with, the home culture. People who desire to maintain their home cultural identity, while gaining new connections, relationships, and knowledge with the new culture choose an integration style, which is noted to be the most difficult style, especially due to balancing languages and intergroup dynamics (Zagefka & Brown, 2002). Those who seek to gain the new culture and lack motivation to maintain the home culture and relationships use the assimilation

style. Assimilation has advantages such as greater contact with the new culture, and better long-term adjustment, but also comes with the disadvantage of losing the social support from home cultural contacts (Berry, 1997, 2003, 2005).

***Assimilation.*** A few examples in particular stand out as assimilation and are striking because of the negative, intergroup responses they generate. As prior research has noted (Berry, 1997, 2003, 2005), an assimilation style can have a bittersweet outcome. This is because although there is a strong commitment and motivation to understand and develop skills in the new host culture and to developing relationships with hosts, it comes at the cost of sacrificing connections with the home (Chinese) culture and community.

The first story is told regarding another Chinese and is narrated by Hu, an undergraduate, as both a success story, but with strong negative overtones. It is about a Chinese female who takes up American ways, but in the opinion of the respondent, does so in too “brazen” a way, which is looked down upon by other Chinese. She cut herself off from the Chinese community by apparently acting too good for them and by her overzealous attitude toward Americans and English. The respondent began:

Among the Chinese that I know, there is a female, she’s extremely outgoing to communicate with Americans, but, she’s too... she gives people the impression that she’s worships foreigners and is fawning toward them, you know? The Chinese community feels she fawns on Americans like that, and then like, well I don’t have a personal opinion about her (laugh).

From this statement, it is easy to see that being “too” into Americans and American culture is not seen as a good thing, at least by this respondent. She continued later when the interviewer asks

her if she knows, “examples of people who are very outgoing or active in their interactions and communication with Americans?”

R: Yes. But then no one likes her. She’s too extreme.

I: Can you describe a little; how does she interact with Americans?

R: Brazen. She’s just very, because I think when you are with Americans, you have to be very open, so um, how do you say it, I just think, for example, Americans generally communicate together using a lot of body language. But among Chinese, body language is actually used relatively little. So you, to give an example, if you want to express to Americans affectionate feelings, when you see them you’d give them a hug, or say “I missed you,” which is Western culture or American culture. It’s not Chinese, which is an introverted culture. So most Chinese, they... oh, I’ve gotten off topic.

I: No, no, it’s okay.

R: I think I’m, I’ve gotten myself off topic.

I: No, no, its okay, its good.

R: Okay. Then, that girl, then, I know that person, she, she is completely open in front of Americans. She’s so eager, and then, to her Chinese circle, she’s very, to tell the truth, she exposed her true nature... ... before, every time you’d see her, with every Chinese she’d be speaking English! And then, I don’t know whether she heard others talking, I don’t know whether she knew that other Chinese, because of these things, didn’t really like her, after that when you see her, she’d sometimes speak Chinese and whatnot.

I: What about, with Americans, do you think her communication is successful?

R: I think it’s very successful. If you judge by this, she truly is very successful. Because she’s very open, moreover, she’s what you call, um, adapted, truly she’s adapted to American culture and things. For example, being able to speak out her thoughts and

feelings. Furthermore, you know, because she's like that, because she's always approaching Americans, and then her English is always improving, this keeps reinforcing her communication with Americans. Then you know, like this, it keeps getting better and better. But actually, other Chinese can't be like this. First of all they don't have the motivation, and secondly they don't have that, they can't adapt to American culture like her. Third, oral English, the less you speak it the worse it gets.

Being too into American culture can be perceived as a bad thing among Chinese, especially when someone seemingly fawns on Americans and takes a superior attitude toward other Chinese. It is noteworthy that Hu, an undergraduate, described opposites where people are either very "Chinese" and "introverted," or overly adapted and fawning toward Americans. If other Chinese share this perception, it could be a barrier that is not normally perceived because it has to do with Chinese identity and with support of the group identity and status quo. Ingroup members typically highly value the opinions and approval of their group members, and sojourning individuals rely on their groups for social support. If there is a belief among Chinese internationals that leaving the group, shunning other Chinese, and assimilating to American culture is the only way to adapt well in the U.S., many Chinese would probably rather not adapt well.

This case may well stand as a warning to other Chinese to not get "too" into American culture. Therefore, it may be perceived by Chinese to be preferable to choose separation strategy of acculturation rather than risk being isolated from the Chinese community. Although it should not be necessary to choose one or the other, it may be perceived by other Chinese that it is better not to become "too American" in one's ways, which may be looked down upon.

A second respondent, Tian, an undergraduate, describes in a much more positive light, the choices she personally had made in order to achieve what she came to the United States to do. She also inferred that she had made her choices because she feels it is an either/or proposition and that there is not a way to stay in the Chinese circles and manage to make relationships with Americans. She began by discussing her closest American friend, and went on to explain she doesn't have many Chinese friends because she had to cut herself off from them in order to fully enter into American interactions.

R: I have a lot of friends, but depend on how close you define it. She will be my close American friend, others are general friends.

I: So in comparison to your Chinese friends, how would you describe her?

R: I would say she is even closer than even my Chinese friends, because I have to say that I'm not really that close with a lot of Chinese. 'Cause I feel like if I only hang out with Chinese, it would be hard for me to do well in J school (Journalism School) in general, because J school I mean, like needs a lot of interactions with class or Americans in general 'cause we don't have a lot, Journalism does not have a lot of Chinese. Plus I feel like, I just didn't really have much. This might sound bad – but I just don't really like to sit with Chinese in the class. Because I know if I sit with them, no Americans will want to talk to me, and they will just see me as I couldn't speak English. But I'm not, and want to learn and, because I paid money to, to be in that class. I didn't pay to sit with a Chinese to, just, procrastinating the whole time in the class. That might sound bad to most of Chinese, maybe they think like, I just only like to talk with Americans, but that's just a decision to make.

I: How do they react to it?



R: Ah, it would be awkward. Because of course, maybe only me and another Chinese girl in class, and I'm not sitting with her and I know her because I talk to her once in a while after class. It's awkward because you know her and you just go sit somewhere else.

I: Are there any other Chinese who feel like you do?

R: They probably did, but didn't say it in my face. I have to say if I stick with Chinese, my English wouldn't be like this. It's never going to happen, so...

I: So when you sit apart from the other Chinese, what happens in the class in general?

R: I would feel like that's normal; more comfortable to me. If I sit together with Chinese, Americans will look at us differently, they are going to think we couldn't talk. But if we sit apart and even I don't talk, they will look at me normal, I would say, 'cause at least maybe they'll think at least I can speak English or for me what I do – I'm getting better at this, not that obvious. I will try to talk to them first, because I'm still an Asian face, look Chinese. I don't know how they think of me. If I don't try to talk, they don't know if I can talk, but that's how I got started. After I got confident about my English.

I: So you initiate with them, what do you say?

R: Probably just stuff I don't understand, or what happened in class, just stuff like that, it wouldn't be just random conversations. After I got confident speaking English, I had random conversations with people sitting next to me, but not a lot of talking, but its still a big class, not like you need the interaction with people.

Several points of interest come out of Tian's comments. First of all, she felt she must choose to stay away from Chinese acquaintances, in order to better engage with Americans. Secondly, she perceives other Chinese as wasting their time, "procrastinating" instead of getting serious about their studies. She saw herself as one that wants to learn, and was sensitive to the high price of an

American education. Third, she believed that Americans would conclude that she couldn't speak English and therefore, would not speak with her if she sat with other Chinese. Even if she said nothing, she believed her interactions with Americans improved, due to their perceptions of her. Fourth, related to this, she went out of her way to initiate with Americans, even in little ways, to let them know that she was a confident English speaker and wanted to interact with them and be one of them.

While the above examples demonstrate the characteristics of assimilation to American culture, as was likely the aim of these individuals, they also indicate two potentially more negative results. First of all, both respondents noted that the choice to really get into American culture and develop skills, abilities, and relationships could come at the cost of goodwill from other Chinese. This attitude needs to be explored further to see if it is a widespread belief because it may help to explain why the majority of Chinese are not putting forth more effort to adapt to and learn about American culture.

Interacting with the intergroup pressures that may motivate Chinese internationals to choose separation over assimilation is due to the response that Chinese may receive from Americans. Hu, an undergraduate, illustrated this as she explained how she was initially outgoing to Americans, but later on, changed her attitude when it seems she didn't get the type of response that she was hoping for. Her response had to do with her desire to be respected for her own culture and identity, and not have to cater to the other... but it also could be a key to the decision that some Chinese feel they have to make. Hu, an undergraduate's comment was this:

I just felt, when I first got to the U.S. I thought I better really proactively approach Americans. But then I thought, 'why should I approach you, I'm, I'm Chinese, it doesn't mean that I need to approach, I have my dignity or something.

Hu's reaction seems to be related to an American attitude toward Chinese. Berry (2008) has found that a host culture's attitude toward acculturation influences the available options to the acculturating people. In other words, some cultures (including the U.S.) tend to prefer that outsiders either choose to separate or assimilate, and are not very tolerant of individuals who try to maintain their home cultural identity and adapt to the new culture as bicultural individuals. This is the other side of the coin. Although more Chinese maybe would like to be more integrating with American culture, if they encounter negative attitudes from Americans, that strengthens the dichotomy between either separation or assimilation. Then they may feel they have to choose whether they will give up their Chinese connections or adapt to American culture.

Exploring this premise further, English and an English accent should be considered. Americans are intolerant of English as a second language speakers who have heavy accents (Lee & Rice, 2007). This is quite different in China, where speaking a few words of Chinese as a foreigner usually leads to words of praise from Chinese, or where Chinese-speaking foreigners are often seen as cute and popular. So when Chinese arrive in the U.S. having studied English for years and Americans fail to recognize the hard work they have put in, or possibly express contempt for their poor pronunciation, Hu's reaction expressed above makes a little more sense.

***Integration.*** Respondents who demonstrate an integrative style of acculturation take initiative to get involved with campus events, work to speak English with Americans, may live with Americans, or do many of the other things that "outgoing" or assimilating Chinese described above may do. The difference is that they have not cut themselves off from their Chinese community. Respondents that reflected an integration style were involved with both groups. Some examples that demonstrated this are: living with a mixed group of Americans and Chinese, being highly involved with Chinese student groups (while at the same time living with

Americans), taking initiative to get involved with mostly American groups, while staying connected with Chinese circles, etc. One of the respondents mentioned seeking to help other Chinese connect with the Americans he's met by taking them with him to meet Americans.

Although it seems clear that a few of the respondents are at least fairly successful at living out an integration style while the majority of Chinese are separated and a few others are assimilated, it is not clear why the integrated ones have been able to do so. Given the current level of institutional support on most American university campuses, it is likely that only the Chinese internationals who have a unique blend of motivation and skills (including English language skills, academic skills, and interpersonal skills) are able to successfully integrate. For the remaining students, who may be forced to choose between essential needs: academic success, and the Chinese communality, which brings support, safety and security, and secondary goals: top-level English and more potential American friends, a choice shrouded in uncertainty and insecurity (about grades, morals, or being cut off from other Chinese), their choices will ultimately continue to be toward the former. Past research has shown that integration is the most difficult strategy, even though it may be the most desired (Berry, 2008). It requires not only a desire to seek out host cultural members, but also the communicative flexibility and deftness to adapt to the new culture without seeming to "fawn." It requires a desire to stay connected with home cultural friends and contacts without becoming "closed off" or complacent. These mature qualities are difficult to perform unless one is highly motivated and also require the support of the host culture (Berry, 2008). Recommendations for how higher education administrators can further help Americans and Chinese integrate are given in the discussion chapter.

## **Summary of Acculturation and Adaptation**

The two main styles that Chinese internationals use to adapt to the United States are: to separate from Americans and cluster together with other Chinese, or to engage with and pursue interactions with Americans. According to respondents, the majority of Chinese choose the separation style, finding it easier, more fun, and less stressful. However, most respondents also lamented the lack of intimate contact with Americans and blamed it on a number of factors both intrinsic and extrinsic: language, motivation, personality, the high number of Chinese, separation caused by applied English programs, and the pressure to succeed academically. Additionally, negative experiences with Americans and misunderstandings about culture and acculturation are factors that may lead to the separation style.

The other acculturative strategy that some Chinese choose is to pursue interaction with Americans, leading to two outcomes: assimilation and integration (theorized by Berry (1997) as two separate styles). Respondents believed that having an outgoing personality and strong motivation were the necessary qualities that enable some to achieve this ideal. While there are apparently some Chinese who are able to engage comfortably with Americans and maintain strong Chinese connections (integrating style), engaging almost entirely with Americans and assimilating is also a possibility. Assimilation style was discussed negatively from the point of view of non-assimilation, and positively from the point of view of an assimilator.

## **Friendship Development**

Exploration into friendship building between Chinese and Americans shows that Americans tend to be more initially outgoing, and that successful friendships often start when Americans initiate with Chinese in some way. However, responses also show patterns of interacting that match with previous research, namely that interaction with Americans is friendly,

but often not very deep, or that initially friendly Americans tend to lose interest or fail to maintain ties after initial contact (Gareis, 2000; Sias et al., 2008). As a result, some Chinese respondents confessed to having few or no friendships with Americans, while others named their relationships as friendships, but noted that they were different from their Chinese, or “real” friends. Another sector of respondents described deep friendships they had developed with Americans and the characteristics of those friendships. As a whole, this section describes a pattern of friendship development between Chinese internationals and Americans. First there tends to be positive appeal that Chinese find in Americans, which is followed by the challenges and difficulties that these cross-cultural relationships and friendships face. Finally, a minority of dyads develop successful friendships, which includes key components that lead to meaningful friendships.

The Americans discussed by Chinese respondents throughout this section were usually the Americans that the participant feels he or she knows the best, and felt most comfortable with (regardless of whether they consider that person to be a friend or not). Throughout the interviews, respondents were asked to choose one American that they knew fairly well to describe. They were asked to discuss how they met them, what they did together, what they talked about, and experiences they may have had together. Toward the end of the conversation, they were asked whether this person was a friend or not. Further, respondents were encouraged to discuss other Americans whom they may have been friends with. In many cases, the people described were considered to be friends on some level, even though it is clear from the descriptions of the relationships and activities that the relationships often are not satisfying and may lack potential to be satisfying.

**Attractions to Americans, and Chinese desires for friendship.** From the perspective of Chinese international student respondents, certain elements attract and encourage interaction between Chinese and Americans. These components draw Americans and Chinese toward each other and sometimes serve as onramps for communication or friendship. The two main elements that respondents discussed were the outgoing friendliness of Americans, and the cultural connections that some Americans possessed, or the desire to make friends with Chinese. By themselves, these elements were not enough to build friendships on, but Chinese respondents saw these elements as appealing and instrumental aspects of relating with, and possibly developing friendships with Americans.

*Americans are friendly, outgoing and nice.* Americans were often described by respondents as being very friendly, and outgoing. Sometimes the Americans they described were classmates or people they saw in the dorm. They did not necessarily have close relationships with them and they may even have been mere surface-level connections, but “nice,” “outgoing,” or “friendly” were some of the adjectives expressed when respondents described Americans. For example, “When I moved into my apartment, the first person I saw was him. We introduced ourselves, said hi, and I thought, he was really nice.” (Xu, G). In addition to being friendly or nice, other related descriptions of Americans included: considerate of internationals, helpful, or good-intentioned.

In some cases, “nice Americans” may be people the respondents had a firmer relationship with, such as workmates or roommates, but often the descriptions were simply of Americans they had met in class or at certain activities, with whom an ongoing, reciprocal relationship had not (yet) developed. While it often stopped there between Chinese and Americans, when

friendships with Americans develop, often it was because further initiative was taken on the part of the American.

***Americans reaching out.*** In this subtheme, Chinese participants described encounters where Americans played a key role in reaching out to them, remembered their name, or invited them to do something. Although not all Americans necessarily reach out to Chinese, when relationships do develop, it often seems to be because Americans reached out first. A summary of responses can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2** *Examples of Americans Reaching out to Chinese*

“She’s really friendly. She’ll touch my shoulder, or she’ll say, ‘hey, [Wang]!’ (Wang, UG)
“She’s pretty, she’s very warm, and toward, toward a different culture pretty interested, so she often calls me to eat together, and then go to church activities or something.” (Rao, UG)
“started hanging out b/c we’re in the same class, same major. He tends to be very curious and wanted to do homework with me.” (Guo, UG)
“She always bring me some small gift like chocolates or something. She share her stories to me.” (Dong, UG)

Another important part of American friendliness is helping behaviors. This supportive behavior is commonly mentioned when describing how friendships develop. See Table 3.

**Table 3** *Summary of American Helping Responses*

“Well she um. I am applying for the scholarship hall. And she helped me to understand the questions, and, the questions is about how I will contribute to the scholarship hall. And she helped me to think of some ideas related to my culture.” (Ren)
He really likes to help people... for example, my car accident, he initiated and just came to help me figure something out. For example, he took me to the tow company, then drove to me, then found a person to tow it to a mechanic, asked questions, then in the end it was too expensive, when it was fixed. Then he helped me see who might want to buy it, went online and found friends, a friend of a friend to help, all sorts of things. And no matter what problem I ask him about, he helps out. (Xu, G)
Ren: So every time I have questions about American cultures, American events, I will ask him... Funny stuff around... So she explained the sign language to me. How it works. And the



basketball rules. And her family. And my family. We introduced our families to each other.
Guo: If I ask what is this, what is this called, he'll give some explanations. And when we have conversations not just between us, but with others, and they say idioms or slangs, I will ask him what it means. b/c we know each other and he's very willing to take the time to explain. Many times he'll think its funny to explain what it is.
... Sports. I don't follow football that closely, but he used to be a football player, so we talk more bball than football. But sometimes I learn about football from him. (Guo, UG)
"When I need some help, he's there to help." (Du, UG)

Helping behaviors are obviously important, especially when most internationals do not drive at the beginning of their sojourn. So small helps can make a big difference. In addition, taking them places they would not normally go and explaining what is happening (such as at church, on in a basketball game) was also mentioned, and in this way the American became a cultural bridge. A good example of this was Liu, an undergraduate's description of learning American culture, "Americans have some humor and whatnot. They say things, but I don't understand. They explain it to me."

So not only are Americans friendly, but respondents noted how they reached out, recognized that they need help, and provided practical help to them. Sometimes these helps were small, sometimes they are practical things, and at other times they are culturally related explanations.

***Chinese culture connections and attractions to foreign-ness.*** Besides the overall friendliness of Americans that was attractive to Chinese, possessing some sort of Asian or Chinese connection was often mentioned as an attraction. Likewise, if an American had some attraction to the "foreign-ness" of the Chinese, this was seen as an attraction. Responses that demonstrate these attractions are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4** *Summary of Attractions to Americans*

Category	Sample Responses
Chinese or Asian connection	A tattoo of a Chinese character An interest in Asian food Possessing Asian or partly Asian heritage Having Asian friends or overseas experience Ability to pronounce Chinese names/words
Interest in Chinese or Asian culture	“she really wanted to understand my culture” (Luo, UG) An interest in Chinese film. Asking for an explanation about something Chinese or Asian (ie: “what is this?”).
Noted interest in the “foreign-ness” of the other	Curiosity in cultural differences, or in what seems strange or different, whether it is looks, language, customs, or patterns of relating.

These influences break the ice and opened doors to communication. For the most part, respondents reacted positively and expressed a desire to discuss Chinese culture, explain their background, or share experiences when Americans appeared interested. They also expressed some level of closeness to Americans with whom they had these experiences or notice some cultural connection, as demonstrated by Ren, “Yeah. He likes to talk with Asians, so I feel comfortable.”

Beyond noting particular experiences with Americans, respondents commonly mentioned that having an interest in or openness to Chinese culture was a desirable trait for an American that they would want to interact with or make friends with. It is interesting to note that while some of the culture connections were tangential or seemingly trivial. For example a Chinese character tattoo; even these small signs stand out to the respondents enough for them to break the ice. As one respondent explained, this interest in Chinese culture seemed to, “reduce the barriers

a bit” (Wang, UG). Respondents also expressed that an interest or background in Asian culture made them feel more comfortable with an American. Sometimes they went as far as clearly citing the connection as crucial to the development of the relationship. At least, they claim, it provided some starting place for the relationship, and a conversation topic that they could discuss, which is evident in Cao, an undergraduate’s response,

Um, this is hard... I think at the start our communication was based on, ‘you are Chinese, it’s your Chinese culture, and our (American) culture.’ We were able to talk about this a lot because I am also curious about them. But at the start, it is them who are curious about us and us about them. In this way we can build up trust.

When asked if an interest in Chinese culture were an important characteristic in an American, Peng, an undergraduate, replied, “Very important, because this is a topic of conversation, and this topic can be expanded upon.” Another respondent, Qiao, an undergraduate, described how an American’s interest in Chinese culture, and specifically, a Chinese film watched in class, helped launch their discussions, and provided a place of comfort and expertise, where she could explain what she knew to someone who was interested in it. She went on to explain that when an American teacher pronounced her name correctly, she immediately felt a connection,

Because my name, it starts with a “Q,” and that “Q” sound, Americans find it very hard to pronounce. I’ve been here for several years, in the U.S., and not a single American teacher was able to accurately speak my name. It’s always a total mess, so you know it is me. But this was the first. Up till now it’s never happened, so it’s the only time someone’s been able to pronounce my name accurately.

In addition to a specific Asian or Chinese cultural connection, respondents also described how being different, or being foreign, seemed to have, from their perspective, been an attraction

for some Americans, or for them. In response to the question, “why does this person like you?” Wang, an undergraduate, replied,

One reason is because I’m a foreigner. They are pretty friendly to me; and sometimes I bring gifts to them, for example at Chinese New Year, I bring them a little something, speak a little Chinese to them, and they are interested in this.

So Chinese found that Americans are outgoing and friendly, while Americans and Chinese indulged their curiosity through engaging with each other and perhaps learning a bit about each other’s culture. If there is a cultural link to Asia or China on the part of the American, Chinese respondents seemed to find this encouraging and comforting as it may signal a larger interest in them or some capacity to communicate more effectively with them. These small signs of interest or connection, such as a question about Chinese food, could be taken by respondents to be indicators of the receptivity of host nationals, which has been noted as a key aspect of friendship formation (Gareis, 2000; Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

**Problems and difficulties in making friends with Americans.** While the attractions of friendliness or the promise of cultural connections pulled Chinese toward Americans, these attractions, for some interviewees, were not enough to sustain ongoing or genuine friendships. Rather, when relationships were explored, some respondents reported having relatively few friendships, no friendships, or friendships that while amicable, really were not deep or reciprocal, as in their good Chinese friendships. This section explores the remarks by Chinese respondents that American friendliness is shallow and that developing friendships with Americans was difficult. Many respondents admitted that they had few friendships with Americans; or that the friendships with Americans were different or less genuine than friendships with Chinese. The

section ends with a summary of Chinese respondents' conceptions of what ideal friendships should be.

*Although friendly, Americans don't go deep.* Clashing with the attraction factors mentioned above, and seemingly to the surprise of Chinese respondents, the friendliness that they initially sensed and took note of in Americans is reported oftentimes to turn out to be merely superficial in their opinion. While the Chinese respondents did not necessarily consider Americans to be disingenuous, they did express confusion with the mixed messages that Americans seemed to send. Specifically, they claimed that while Americans were "nice," the niceness did not often extend as deeply as they hoped and expected. Responses can be summarized in three ways: 1) Americans seemed to desire to constrain relationships and keep them at a superficial level, 2) the relatively little interaction outside of classrooms kept relationships from developing further, and 3) talk with Americans rarely went beyond chitchat or saying "hi."

Frustration could be sensed from Chinese when they described these relationships. For example, describing in-class behavior, Guo, an undergraduate, said, "it's usually just 'how have you been lately, or where are you from? How long have you been here? How do you feel about the U.S.?' that's about it." When asked if relationships with Americans are friendships, there were varying responses, but respondents made it clear that there is a difference between these relationships and the type of friendships they would prefer, as Lu said, "it is a friendship, but it isn't a very intimate or deep friendship." Guo went further when questioned by the interviewer, "Among your American friends, do you have any that are intimate friends?"

"No."

Some respondents, despite having positive interactions with Americans, reported having few or no friends (or no “real” friends). For example, when asked “besides this person, do you have anyone you’d consider to be a friend?” Ma replied,

I think right now (after several years in the U.S.) there aren’t any. They basically are just classmates. After graduation, I doubt I’ll communicate much with any of them... this kind of ‘friend.’

Peng, an undergraduate, stated it more simply when asked if there was any follow up to a positive connection he had in the classroom: “No.”

“None?” (Interviewer).

“None.”

Another respondent considered his primary American contact to be a friend, but was not able to describe much interaction with him. Replying to the follow up question, he admitted that this friend is the only one that he could claim among Americans.

Xiao, an undergraduate, comes right out and clarifies that if the concern is deep communication, she didn’t have any American friends like that, “I think if its deep communication we are talking about, I have very little. Actually none.” When probed deeper regarding communication, she responded, “that’s having experienced some things together; even if it’s just going out to eat, (there’s) very little.”

Finally, Xie, an undergraduate, described having lots of contacts, and a few people who would help her in need, but no “good” friends,

Um... I think friends, this is really general, but good friends I don’t have, truly I don’t have any good friends. But friends, if you have something that you need some help with,

I have friends who would be glad to help. I have some, two or three, although not that many.

So, while the interest in Americans, and perceived interest from Americans attracted Chinese and helped initiate communication, perceived restraints, whether it be from the Americans themselves or other reasons, keeps Chinese and Americans separated, or at least keeps their relationships from developing more than in a superficial way. The end result is there were few deep or real friendships.

***Negative Perceptions of Americans.*** While many respondents expressed positive perceptions of Americans, and nearly all had some positive comments about Americans generally, negative perceptions outweigh the positive perceptions, both in number and in valence. The three main categories that negative perceptions fall under were: Americans' attitudes toward China and Chinese, Americans' communication patterns, and Americans' habits and behaviors.

Chinese were critical of Americans for the negative attitudes that they sensed toward China and other cultures and countries generally. Specifically this was expressed as a lack of interest in other cultures (including Chinese), closed-mindedness toward new things, an arrogant and ignorant attitude toward China, and an overall superior attitude. For example, Zhao, a graduate student, discussed the lack of positive understanding that Americans had toward China and other countries, "...The mass media here doesn't give a very positive portrait of any country outside of America. I think, I'm not sure if it's because of education or whatever, but Americans are not very willing to know the other side." Xie, an undergraduate, explained her experiences and perceptions of Americans regarding their openness to Chinese culture:

I think, I think Americans are too sheltered. Last semester, I took a class called International Journalism, and that class specifically looked at a different country's background each class, and one class was on China. So I was asked by the teacher to come to the front and do a Q and A, and so everyone asked all sorts of really strange questions. For example, can people get meat to eat in most places in China? Or, since I said that there was state control, Internet control, and that you couldn't get on Facebook, Twitter, or those sites, they said, 'well, I'm American, can't I get on in China? They really understood so little about China. And you know, it's not like us where every day we watch the news and keep up with the American presidential elections, we are, everyone knows very clearly who was elected, who won, who lost. But for Americans, including when our national congress was having the 18<sup>th</sup> Selection Meeting [November of 2012] and chose a new leader, I think Americans absolutely don't know. According to them... they are just too sheltered, their sheltered life allows them to think that they are the greatest place on earth, and sometimes they just don't want to understand. Every time you tell them something, they express total surprise, it's like, 'oh really?' but then it never changes.

Related to a general American lack of openness to other cultures or different things, Hu, an undergraduate, bluntly stated her point of view, that Americans are more into their own lives, "I think the vast majority are just not interested at all, they just think, they just think every day of their own life as the most important thing, 'except for myself I don't pay attention to anything else, why on earth should I pay attention to you?'" Discussing her experiences while on a study abroad in London, Luo, an undergraduate, explained, "the middle class Kansas kids, they were totally enthralled by American culture... like they thought they were so amazing. Those were



the ones who would go out on the street and see a hotdog and get so excited, or always be looking for that kind of American culture.”

This trait of being closed to others and to Chinese is important because respondents realized that if Americans were closed to them, they really had little opportunity to engage in mutual sharing of culture and background. From their perspective, they had taken the leap to come to the United States, and had already learned a great deal about the U.S. and American culture, but Americans had done much less to understand them. On the other hand, Chinese in China typically are friendly and hospitable to foreigners, especially Americans (although perhaps less so now than in years past), so international students may feel frustrated that they do not get the same type of treatment from Americans. Sun, a graduate student, summarized what a lot of Chinese seemed to express, “I don’t expect people know all things about Chinese, but at least respect the culture. Ask. Don’t interrupt or assume – sometimes Americans assume a lot of things based on their culture and think oh you mean this - but you didn’t.” Peng, an undergraduate, expressed a similar sentiment when asked what Americans could do to improve relations with Chinese, “be more understanding; a good change would be, when you don’t understand something, don’t just casually judge.” Keeping with the theme of not rushing to judgment, Zhao, a graduate student, added, “Don’t have an agenda. Just be open about culture differences.” Another suggestion, from Xie, an undergraduate, was, “I just think they really should take a Chinese 101 or some kind of course.”

In support of the perceptions that respondents had of Americans’ attitudes is a rather long list of negative communication habits that they saw Americans embodying: stubborn, selfish, ignorant, aggressive, impatient, superficial, talk a lot to show what they know, not sensitive to face concerns, and not so smart. Comparing Americans to the way that Chinese interact, Qiao,

an undergraduate, noted that Americans didn't seem to have the same kind of social filter that helps them to watch out for and not offend others:

for example, Chinese fear embarrassment and losing face. And not just themselves, they fear losing face themselves, sure, but what if something leads to someone else losing face or something like that? But I feel that Americans aren't too concerned about that.

This social filter may make Chinese more sensitive to the relatively direct and sometimes critical communication that they have received in the United States.

Some respondents offered explanations for where their comments came from, and it was not difficult to deduce why they may have negative perceptions. Rao explains:

my friend... hmmm... it had to do with when she was living with her American roommate and it was regarding air conditioner disputes. Because Chinese sort of are afraid of the cold, sometimes in the winter, but Americans like to keep the heat really low, so my friend, she would often fight with her roommate trying to resolve this problem. She feels that Americans are relatively selfish, because if I changed the thermostat I tell you, but when you do something you don't say anything, so this was her feeling...

And in a similar style, regarding the ignorance that Americans sometimes express and the effect it can have, Zheng, an undergraduate, commented:

...before they understand, they already have an inflexible belief, a conclusiveness... I'll give you the simplest example. The simplest example is I, the third day after I arrived in the U.S. a classmate and I, we borrowed a bike and went to Wal-Mart, and when we were riding the bike at \_\_\_\_\_ intersection, it's a big intersection, right there we were waiting for a red light. We were riding a bike and then, an American drove up beside us and said, "Go back to China!" Lots of times people don't understand, just a stranger sees you

riding a bike and says you aren't friendly, you should, you shouldn't have come here or be here in this country, you are a foreigner, and it's a very intense hostility. I think a lot of times before you have even begun to communicate; this hostility has already taken shape. So sometimes this is a huge hindrance I think.

This story illustrates the elusive nature of perceptions, because they may be based on the actions of another who themselves are influenced by their stereotypes. And as these stories elucidate, intimate contact can lead to the creation of negative stereotypes, as other research has shown (Tropp, 2003).

Some perceptions are not necessarily based on negative behavior, but simply on different cultural expectations, which can lead to a generalization:

People here are really weird: for guys – they don't want to hang out they just want to date you. And for girls, they talk things I don't interested in – like makeup, sex, etc. – but I want to talk about interesting things, like movies or how's your major, share something more broad. (Sun, G)

A few respondents also noted that their problem was not so much with Americans in general, as it was with young Americans, or American college students. Hu explained:

Right now I feel that I don't like to communicate with American students, I like to communicate with older Americans, because they are very mature and they are relatively patient and they know how to speak clearly and slowly. And also, suppose you don't understand their question, they will explain it to you, but American students won't.

As this comment shows, the negative perceptions may be relating to the immature Americans that they meet on college campuses, rather than to Americans in general. However, many Chinese internationals may have few opportunities to meet Americans who are not students.

In addition to experiencing and perceiving some negative communication styles and habits, respondents also perceived Americans to have some very negative habits and behaviors. These negative qualities can be summarized as: dangerous, dirty, morally lax, loving loud music, loving partying, and not hard working. Because of living together in a shared dorm space, a few respondents described in detail their feelings about American housekeeping standards:

Because we lived together, there were a lot [of negative experiences]! I complained a lot about slovenliness, you know. Just stuff strewn around... ..and so stuff was, well, clothes were flung around all over the floor. I couldn't stand it. Also, I went into her room and it was sock, clothes all over (laugh). (Pan, UG)

Ma explained a bit more his perspective:

Because Chinese feel that a dorm room should be kept clean, and Americans appear, well when I first came I felt a lot of people were really slovenly, even girls, clothes flung around all over, shoes on the bed, stuff stuck right next to their pillows, crumbs on their pillows, and totally casual about it all, but Chinese are pretty fastidious, and they are pretty coarse.

These characteristics may stand out to Chinese in particular because these habits are only observable once they live with an American (probably not through media, and therefore, Chinese may not have been primed to this prior to coming to the U.S.), and because dorm living in Chinese institutions usually takes place with more roommates sharing closer quarters, and thus may require a higher level of cooperation to keep the area clean and tidy. What's more, American college dorm mates live in increasing privacy, which may promote more slovenliness on the part of individuals.

Partying and behavior that goes along with the partying culture, as has been mentioned, is something that Chinese found to be noticeably different. Du, an undergraduate, stated simply,

“Well, Americans love to party, really love to watch sports. Before I came I thought this, and after coming here I still do.” Other comments about these behaviors are mostly disparaging, as Chinese sometimes felt that they were unsafe, which caused them anxiety. Ren explained what she considered to be “crazy” behavior, “Get drunk and drive very fast, very, very fast! This is crazy I think, because it’s dangerous. And crazy, also like go to the party and do crazy stuff.” Most respondents did not discuss openly their opinions about American sexual expression, since it is a taboo topic in Chinese culture, and therefore most referred to Americans as being too “open” or too “casual.” Sometimes they did openly admit that some of them consider the open sexual behavior as shameful, noting that some Chinese consider American girls to be “sluts” (Song, UG). Perhaps what shocked Chinese about the behavior of Americans was not the immoral behavior itself, but the “casual” and “open” ways in which they discussed and demonstrated their sexuality and sexual openness (Qiao, Song, Lu), compared to Chinese, who tend to keep subjects such as sexuality, especially illicit sexual practices, as ‘open’ secrets – something that most everyone knows about, but rarely ever mention due to its taboo nature.

Beyond partying and sexuality, another negative perception was that Americans as a whole were not as intelligent as they had originally assumed. This is especially noteworthy, since these perceptions are mainly directed at American college students. These perceptions may be influenced by the “stupid questions” that were sometimes asked of Chinese about their country (Zhao, Xie), and general ignorance of China and other non-American countries that they notice, and may have been magnified by their original perceptions of the United States as a forward-thinking and innovative country. Coming to the U.S., international students may have been expecting Americans to be very focused, since the U.S. is so influential. But, as Zhao

explained, she now has other explanations for U.S. ingenuity, and a new perspective on Americans:

Most of the people are more stupid than I thought. You know, America is a very advanced country. They have cutting edge technology, they are basically 20 years ahead of China, but people in general, they don't give me that cutting edge feeling. I don't remember who said, 'America is led by 2% of the elite, and the rest are just followers,' I didn't know that until I lived here. No hard feelings, it's just...

Ke agreed, "originally, I thought that Americans were really clever and smart, but now I think, well, not so much." Other respondents, especially those who are teaching assistants, noted that in comparison to Chinese students, Americans generally are not that hard working either. Yang, a graduate student, described American students that he often finds:

I feel the questions they ask, mostly – they should be able to find the answer themselves, but they don't pay enough effort. So that's my general impression. ...Some American students are very smart and they pay the effort. But at KU I cannot see many such students, gifted students.

Later on, however, he noted American students' behavior really depends on the individual, as opposed to Chinese students:

American students are – so maybe there is no neutral attitude in them. So maybe for some Chinese students, they don't pay much attention, but they don't quit that. They're just normally doing on their own level. But for American students, if they regard it seriously, the student will study this hard. But if they didn't regard it seriously, they'll have a bad grade, like a F maybe, or D maybe for just passing. They are maybe more extreme than Chinese students. Either they are very serious, or they didn't attend class,

they didn't attend exam, they don't do homework. Or they did it all and their homework is always nice and clean and their exams are always a high level...

This excerpt shows, as do certain others, that whatever general perceptions there might be of Americans, they are often tempered by the realization that it depends on the individual. This ability to see the diversity in Americans is an important characteristic that some respondents seem able to embody more than others.

Many of these observations have come from negative experiences that Chinese had with roommates or firsthand encounters with Americans that they did not get along well with, which again is support for other research that stereotypes and prejudice develop partially from negative intercultural/intergroup contact as well as from ignorance or lack of contact.

***Friendships are difficult.*** In seeking to describe the communication between Chinese and Americans, or explain why there are so few meaningful friendships to discuss, respondents sometimes directly addressed how difficult it is for Chinese to make friends with Americans. For Wei, a graduate student, friendships were perceived to be easy for Americans to make with Chinese (since the desire for the Chinese is there), but not for Chinese to make friends with Americans (since there is often a perceived lack of desire on the part of Americans):

Americans if they want to make friends, attitudinal and motivational levels, if they want to make friends with Chinese students, there is no challenges of areas there. If the American part decided to make friends, I don't see it as a challenging process. It is a challenging process for Chinese to make friends with Americans. So one thing is willingness.

Similarly, Ren commented,

I think Americans are more friendly than I thought before. But I think I could um, before I am here I thought I could make American friends more easier, but even if, even though they are friendly, it is not easy to make friend. Like, you might say “Hi” on campus to each other, but you won’t call each other to dinner or go out. I think it’s more difficult than I thought to make friends with, make real friends with Americans...

Discussing the fact that she once considered some people friends, but no longer does, Guo explained how things have changed since she no longer lives with her American contacts:

It’s because... not living together anymore we don’t communicate often, you don’t have much chance to run into each other. And then our class schedules aren’t the same and so we hardly see each other on campus. So when we do run into each other... there’s that fond feeling, but we are all busy, so we say we’ll get together and go out, but then we just let it go (laugh)... And then we don’t use the phone to connect and share intimate things.

Another issue, related to culture and discussed here by Song, an undergraduate, is that it is hard to connect on an emotional and relational level with Americans, especially, as Song explains, when they are in big crowds:

Umm, I really don’t, I really don’t fear talking to Americans, but I don’t especially like going, well it’s not that I don’t like to, it’s just that, it’s just I think it’s pretty hard to get close with American friends. ...It could be an attitude problem, because I feel I can naturally enter Chinese circles, but I can’t naturally enter American circles, although I really want to make friends with Americans, but it’s because of some culture problems. Sometimes when I’m around them, for example when you’re with a big group of Americans, that’s when they will all discuss some things, but when you really don’t know,



you just, you naturally become silent. So I don't really proactively say to Americans, we are friends.

Similarly, noting that the difficulties do not simply lie with Americans, Guo mentioned that after the initial period of interest wears off for Chinese, the most difficult part is choosing to engage with Americans, which is not always easy because of language and cultural differences, but which leads to more positive relationships and abilities. The opposite is to choose to take the “easy route” and communicate primarily with Chinese, in which case connections with Americans will fade.

Second period, where to go – try harder to communicate with Americans, or pick the easier way which is there are tons of Chinese available, so this period many people make different choices, I don't think there's a right or wrong, but people make choices, and after that enters what I call a cycle – if you choose to be with Americans more, you start making friends, you improve your English, you make more friends. However if you choose to stay with Chinese, they tend to stick together, study together play together and eventually you don't find the need of speaking English outside of class. People take different paths of communicating (Guo, UG).

So, there are a number of reasons that Chinese find it difficult to make deeper friends with Americans, despite the initial friendliness of Americans. Some Americans seem to have barriers in place that keep Chinese at arms' length, other factors may limit the amount of interaction that Americans and Chinese have outside of the classroom, and Chinese themselves may have barriers that keep them from engaging with Americans in ways that would contribute to deeper friendships. Because of these factors, friendship building between Americans and Chinese is difficult, and thus many Chinese have few or no friendships with Americans.

*Friendship with Americans is different from Chinese friendships.* Due to the above problems, friendships with Americans, even when they existed, were often described as being different from their friendships with Chinese. The differences may indicate cultural differences, or differences in the quality and strength of the relationship, for example, Lin, a graduate student's comment highlighted the insecurity that Chinese have,

They are quite different but that might be because I don't really have many American friends. So for me, I will be a little nervous around my American friends, sometimes I don't know if this kind of stuff, this expression will offend them. They don't really know if it will offend me. Or if they say this, I don't know if there's some meaning back there sometimes.

Likewise, Fan, a graduate student, explained that although she has contact with Americans, the relationship was hindered in some way,

Some of them even invited me to their house to have dinner. But I don't know if they are friends or not, because they are different than my Chinese friends and like my Chinese friend, we can communicate, like saw (sic) movies, and what's funny, what am I doing, I don't have a boyfriend, or break up with him... something like that. But Americans, I don't have a chance to communicate with them deeply.

In some cases, the differences in friendship may have indicated a lack of depth in the friendship and/or a lack of depth in understanding American culture, or a lack of common ground, "for example, they like to talk about the weather, but when they are done, and I'm done saying all I can, there are no other topics to continue talking about..." (Rao, UG). This brings up a logical limitation in communicating interculturally, that lacking commonalities and shared background brings increased discomfort and disability to discuss more things. Yang, a graduate student,

agreed, “yeah, of course, the deeper the friendship is, the more background, more stories you share. I definitely have more to share with my old Chinese friends. We have a lot more background, know each other definitely better than American students.”

Responses from participants indicated four important conceptions of what friendship is for them. In this section, I will explore what defined friendship for respondents, and when respondents decided that their relationships with Americans are at that level. Table 5 summarizes the four conceptions of friendship.

**Table 5** *Respondents' Conceptions of Friendship*

Frequent contact; deep contact	<p>“Being able to chat, or exchange ideas...” (Qiao, UG)</p> <p>“Just because we communicate a lot, then we both like each other” (Luo, UG)</p>
Expressing deep feelings; having deep feelings; a relaxed communication environment where they can express their feelings	<p>“Because I’ve told her a lot of things. If this person lets me tell her a lot of stuff, I think that equals someone who is my friend” (Xie, UG)</p>
Ongoing contact and getting together	<p>“This problem involves, well I think, you have to have communication, mutual concern, then this kind of relationship can continue and can go on, this is called a friend. (Xu, G)</p> <p>“The biggest difference is that, Americans are sort of, relatively, for example, if we are in class together, and then maybe we are in a work group together, so we work together over the course of a semester, and then after the class is over, it seems like he doesn’t even know you, but it seems like this is just the way Americans make friends, but it is different from Chinese..” (Rao, UG)</p> <p>“Maintaining contact is extremely important...” (Ma)</p>
Doing something outside the classroom; palling around together	<p>“Yes. Um, in China we always have meals with our friends, or go to school, or go shopping. But here, I think they are more individual, like they go shopping at weekend together, but they don’t go to class together or stick together all the time.” (Ren)</p>

In accordance with prior research (Baumgarte, 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), respondents noted how Americans did not tend to maintain friendships over time as they would have expected in their home culture friendships. Specifically, they noted how they thought they had gotten to know certain Americans through interaction in a class or small group, only to find that the American paid little attention to them later.

Related to this, Zheng, an undergraduate, explained a key difference between Chinese and U.S. educational environments:

Because in the U.S. there is no fixed class concept, therefore in a class it is hard to connect, it's like, true friends, the path to making a true friend often goes by way of getting to know each other in the classroom, the classmates you know, who recognize you, but you can't call this friendship. You have to go party with them afterwards, and then it changes, or go play sports with them afterwards, and then you can become friends. But according to our tradition in China, classmates definitely are friends, but here classmates just stands for someone you sort of know...

In China, classmates have all, or nearly all, of their classes together, and typically a set of roommates, who are also classmates, stay in the same room together all four years. Each of these structures naturally helps build connections between classmates and makes them friends. Within the U.S. system, Chinese may feel at a loss when they develop what seems to be a good relationship in a class with an American, only to see it evaporate when the class ends and they no longer regularly see that person or have a systemic connection. This leads to the idea that in order for Chinese to develop friendships with Americans, they must do something with that person outside of the classroom. Kudo and Simkin's research (2003) supports this idea and indicates that Japanese participants were not very active in the friendship process with

Australians. Therefore friendships were more likely to develop in situations where they had natural, ongoing contact with Australians. This principle seems to hold true for Chinese and Americans as well.

To summarize, the promising factors, such as outgoing friendliness that Chinese respondents note when first talking about Americans, end up causing bewilderment for Chinese and in some cases, frustration, or worse. This is due to the fact that Chinese interpret the friendliness of Americans as being an invitation to deep relationships. However, they tended to find that the deeper layers of American friendship were less easily accessed than the exterior layers (see: Altman and Taylor (1973)). The confusion may be due to the American trait of self-disclosing more openly, about more subjects than other cultures, especially Asian cultures (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Kito, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 1991). With this in mind, it is conceivable that Chinese may meet an American in the classroom or elsewhere, have a pleasant interaction in which the American discloses seemingly personal invitation, and the Chinese assumes that a deep connection has been made. Meanwhile, the American may just count it as one of many pleasant interactions, due to the norm of self-disclosure and the tendency for Americans to maintain many more friendships than most other cultures (Gareis, 2000; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Sias et al., 2008). Finally, upon seeing the American at a later time, the Chinese may expect the American to be as enthusiastic toward her as before, and yet may not herself actively reach out or express friendly feelings, due to cultural norms. A cycle such as this may be what leads many Chinese to have few significant friendships with Americans even though they may have had positive encounters with Americans, and primarily consider Americans to be friendly.

***Meta-perceptions and fear of being stereotyped.*** Intermingled with the perceptions that they have of Americans, Chinese international student respondents often reported that they sense

Americans stereotyping them. When they discuss their perceptions of Americans, their perceptions almost always included their meta-perceptions of how Americans view them, and which they are very conscious of. Respondents were sensitive to: being perceived as though all Chinese were the same; the negative stereotypes of what Chinese students have traditionally been like; the negative stereotypes of what today's young Chinese internationals are like; and media representations of Chinese and China.

Without ever saying specifically how, respondents noticed that Americans categorize them, and treat them as being all the same. Fu, a graduate student, noted that there are of course similarities, but still people should be seen for their uniqueness, "...every person is different, and international students they, they have some common characteristics, but still they are all different..." Wei wished that people would see, "not just Chinese, but everyone as individuals, and not stereotyping (like Chinese cannot drive). That takes away your ability to perceive individual attributes and it's hard for you to make friends with someone or willing to initiate interactions if you see them all alike." Guo, an undergraduate, also focused on the general stereotyping and lack of openness of Americans toward Chinese:

Be more open and be more patient, and again, not only with Chinese students, people tend to make conclusions quickly and be misled by stereotypes. If you think this people not fun to hang out with, you will never find this person fun to hang out with and that tends to be the case, esp. for opposite sex. For same sex it's a little better. As a whole, Americans can be more open to differences, to cultures, to almost different ways of looking at things...

These respondents saw stereotyping itself as a barrier to relating with Americans that needed to be crossed. While other respondents agreed with this, they also tended to notice specific characteristics that they wanted Americans to know were untrue of all Chinese.

Some of the specific stereotypes that respondents felt aversion toward is the stereotype that all Chinese are good at math and science as Song, an undergraduate, explains:

Well, because Americans students tend to automatically group Chinese into one, how should I say it, well, like good at math, that sort of thing, being good at sciences... so I really want to say, if you really understand Chinese, you totally cannot say that everyone is like that, because they sometimes take all Chinese and see them as the same. But they forget that every person is unique and there are different factors and influences.

Peng, an undergraduate, agreed, and saw Americans getting the wrong impression by some of the preconceived notions of what certain behaviors mean, “I wish Americans understood, well, that they don’t initiate speaking with you not because they are unsociable, it’s not because they are hard to come into contact with, it really isn’t this.” These comments point to deeper contextual, including cultural, meanings behind the behavior of Chinese that can easily be stereotyped or pigeonholed by Americans if they do not understand the situation.

Some respondents, especially if they are graduate students, were sensitive to the changes in Chinese culture, and the negative stereotypes both of young Chinese in general, as well as the recent wave of young Chinese internationals studying overseas. Ke, a graduate student, explains:

I think Americans, according to what I think, a lot of the Chinese undergrads, they aren’t, they don’t really represent today’s Chinese university students’ style and whatnot. So I wish, if Americans..., I don’t want Americans to get the totally wrong idea. It’s definitely not all Chinese that are rich and drive BMWs, and don’t care about their

studies and things. I don't want them to be, well because of the influence of those students, to be influenced toward all Chinese. I wouldn't like that. Because it's a personal situation, it isn't the whole nation's problem (laugh).

Ke obviously considered these perceptions to be negative because she saw certain behaviors and excesses as negative societal "problems" in China, which many people attribute to the "post-90's" generation of children, most of whom are singletons, and thus are stereotyped by Chinese themselves as spoiled "little emperors." Tian also wanted to create separation between herself and those types of Chinese:

Don't stereotype us. They probably think we're rich kids, cannot speak English, most of us, [that's] not the case. I guess that's it. Don't just see us as Asian and we couldn't talk. Don't judge us by first impression.

She continued:

Somehow, I think Americans think we're rich; Chinese drive nice cars and buy nice merchandise, but I don't. But I can see where that comes from because I see other people. Maybe they think we're just some rich kids and came here and don't speak good English but can still be here.

While these comments are very interesting, as they highlight some of the cultural transformation that is occurring in Chinese society and how Chinese may feel about it, it is impossible to know whether the reactions are generated from the respondent's own reaction to the new, young, rich Chinese students, or from actual interactions she's had with Americans who seemed to stereotype her and other Chinese in that way.

A last category that respondents see as a way that Americans stereotype them is based on media depictions. Luo stated:



I really don't like those misunderstandings where Americans have their own presuppositions... the Chinese that the media shows in China; but actually, if you go and understand Chinese international students, you would realize that the young people aren't that different from you, we like the same things.

In particular, there is a strong, politically charged, and usually negative perception that they notice from Americans, and which some of them attributed to the negative coverage that China receives in the American press. Yu, a graduate student, explained:

And I guess there is this lack of understanding; also lots of misconceptions about China, you know, because of the media and things, because often times, China is being portrayed as sort of a rising opponent, that ripped off American interests - which China did in many ways - but I think it is important to separate the practices of the Chinese government and Chinese companies from ordinary Chinese people. But I think it is hard. It's hard for Chinese too, if they had zero experience abroad before, if they've never talked to a foreigner before. It's hard for them to separate American stereotypes from this American individual. And so it's hard for Americans, right, it's hard for them to separate these two images. And so they tend to have all kinds of stereotypes about Chinese. And I think that may be a barrier to effective communication.

This comment demonstrates a fairly balanced perspective about political realities and the way that they actually play out in life. Yang, a graduate student, expressed a similar sentiment:

Maybe I wish them to realize that the political situation in China is not that bad. I mean, it's worse than America, but not that bad. It's acceptable actually; if you go to any city of China – you can see any people living happily, normally like Americans. It's all because

of the media. There are some Chinese people thinking badly of the western world, it's the same thing happening.

While Americans hear certain things through the media, their lack of real experience may lead to them picturing a dreadful existence in China. Yang realized that Chinese live “happily, normally, like Americans,” possibly because he has realized the same thing vis-à-vis his own assumptions about Americans.

Being sensitive to the perceptions and stereotypes that Americans have of Chinese and Chinese international students may be a product of their intercultural experience. Quite possibly, respondents were unaware of the way that Americans perceived them prior to arriving in the U.S. Their experiences with and observations of Americans likely provided access to these stereotypes. While this could be seen as a negative outcome of intercultural contact, other examples demonstrate the growth that many respondents have experienced. This growth pertains to their perceptions changing and clarifying over time, as well as a more appropriate use of language, which avoids overt stereotyping of Americans. Naturally, they would like for Americans to offer the same goodwill to them.

**Friendship successes.** While discouragement or a sense of failure permeates many Chinese respondents' discourse about American relationships, some of the respondents formed very positive friendships. In this section the qualities that Chinese interactants see in Americans, see in their deep friendships, or that they desire for Americans to have will be explored. Additionally, the closest relationships with Americans will be summarized in hopes of discovering the communication contexts that best support or facilitate positive interaction and friendship development.

***Positive Perceptions of Americans.*** As has been mentioned, the overall positive attitude toward Americans, in spite of many negative perceptions that Chinese respondents in this study had, plays a part in the positive experiences of friendship. Positive attitudes were supported by positive perceptions revolving around the ways that they see Americans as being good in their core characteristics, having an outgoing relational style, and having a practical deportment.

In addition to being seen as nice and friendly, other respondents notice that in their opinion, Americans have good values. Said Wang, an undergraduate, “I thought they were all party girls, like that. But when I first got here I realized that a lot of them really were very simple and pure, they basically come from middle class homes.”

Lin, a graduate student’s description of an encounter with an American, which seemingly influenced her overall perception, summarizes these aspects of Americans:

Yeah, the first time I came here, I feel like Americans are very, very nice. Warm-hearted, nice, helpful. Did I tell you, the first week I came here; I was doing everything on my own to enroll, the procedures, go to health center. I was holding this map, campus map, walking like this, looking for directions. Then somebody passed me, asked me ‘do you know where you’re going, do you need help?’ And more than one person asked the same thing, so I feel like ‘oh people are very helpful.’ Yeah, that was my first expression.

First impressions of Americans that respondents mention tend to fall into these categories, and they are generally viewed positively.

Besides the core characteristics of being nice and having good values, respondents also perceived Americans as embodying an outgoing, relaxed, and nonverbally warm relational style. Yang, a graduate student, explained, “I think American people are more open and friendly than common Chinese people. They accept me and I accept them.” Huang, a graduate student, agreed,

saying, “The positive side is that in this open culture, people are more open compared to Asians to different opinions, they may not be agitated or irritated by whatever you say.” Similarly, compared to Chinese, Americans were seen to be more outgoing (Hu, UG). Qiao, an undergraduate, described Americans as being *zilaishu* (自来熟), which is a term that describes when a person is able to quickly get to know others and develop a bond without having to bother overly with etiquette; when two people can get together and be like old friends in a short period of time. She continued:

Americans mostly are like I said, very *zilaishu*, especially at the gym or playing basketball, that’s when Americans will, really quickly put groups together, and maybe no one in the group knows each other. But Chinese usually form a team and then go out and play together, and if you asked them to add people into a team on the spot, that isn’t likely to happen, at least I’ve never seen it. And then in the library too, they, Americans just, they like studying together at tables, they talk about their studies, they talk together to review their subjects, or even debate together. But Chinese like to sit in a corner or in a seat by themselves. And then the dining hall is the same - because I worked in the dining hall for about a year. So I’ve seen it, I’ve seen a lot of Americans who are very *zilaishu*. ...But when I was working in the cafeteria, I was a part of our work team and that was great. Because Americans are like that, very warm and don’t often cast others out like that.

So from this description, Americans were seen as being outgoing and they easily join up with others and form new groups based upon the circumstances, while Chinese either stay to themselves, or with their ingroups that they have already formed. These observations actually align closely with the somewhat counterintuitive characteristics of individualistic and

collectivistic cultures: individualistic cultures more readily embrace outgroup or non-family members, and make new friends quickly, but tend to have shallower, less long-term bonds. Meanwhile, collectivistic cultures tend to be more closed to people outside of their ingroups or family members, while maintaining long-term, vital and interdependent connections with those people (Hofstede, 2012; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

The final area of positive perceptions that Chinese respondents had of Americans is their helpfulness and ability to solve problems. In these descriptions, Americans were seen as practical and pragmatic, as well as being helpful to Chinese when they have problems. The above quote illustrating how “nice” Americans were seen to be was one example of the helpfulness of Americans. This helpfulness can come from friends or colleagues, “...he’s also very, he’s very helpful in the sense that he makes himself assessable to my needs and questions” (Yu, G), or even friends of friends, and can range from simple gestures, help with a linguistic problem, to much larger issues such as helping someone buy a car, or help deal with the aftereffects of an accident. Song explained how Americans helped her with her classwork when she didn’t understand:

...so I went and asked them, I said do you guys have any good ways to help with this work, and they, they actually are really glad to help you. Not like some, because I have some experience with this, I’ve asked some Chinese international students questions about study methods or classes and they just skimp by on you, but Americans really don’t, if they know something they’ll tell you, so I feel this is really, really good.

Along with seeing them as helpful, respondents described Americans as being very practical and able to solve problems. Xiao said that she knows that Americans are practical because she has become more practical through her time in the U.S. Another respondent, Yang.

A graduate student, noted how, “there’s a difference between us – if we meet something that’s not good for us or unfair, Chinese students will also complain after class but they will accept it. But Americans will find some way to solve it.”

So overall, respondents’ positive perceptions of Americans were that they are nice, and have good values, are open to others, are nonverbally more expressive including being more open to outgroup members, and are also very helpful and practical people. While not all respondents hold with these perceptions, and some people may even contradict them, they constitute the positive perceptions toward Americans from this study. These positive impressions and perceptions are important to recognize since seeing someone as embodying admirable qualities is helpful for developing positive relationships.

**Deep friendships.** In describing the friendships they have with Americans, respondents regularly distinguished, between “regular” friends, and friends that were deeper or closer, which were far less common, but desired by all. These deep friendships were sometimes described as: people with whom they could share their innermost thoughts and feelings with, like brothers, someone they could say anything they wanted without having to edit, someone they could trust, or someone they could have a heart to heart talk with. Sometimes they were described as “true” friends, where there are no barriers between them, or where they see each other just as individuals (rather than as American and Chinese). How do deep friendships develop and how do they differ from the shallow friendships are the questions that will be discussed in this section.

Deep friendships have several characteristics, as summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6** *Summary of the Characteristics of Deep Friendships*

Being able to say what you want	“With K you can just say what you feel, and she will too. (Luo, UG)
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Depth of interaction; sharing intimately	<p>“I can speak my heart to her, and she does to me too.” (Wang, UG)</p> <p>“I can chat about anything in my heart. She has a boyfriend and so do I...” (Cao, UG)</p>
A perceived lack of cultural barriers	<p>“When we are together, its like communicating with a Chinese, there’s no difference, we’re good friends, there’s no, well sometimes there might be something you have to think about in terms of cultural differences, because after all, your speaking English, there’s still a language barrier, but for the most part, you just happily chat and forget about barriers, you can forget your nationality.” (Fu, G)</p> <p>“And after awhile, they don’t consider me as a Chinese, they consider me as [my name], a unique person just like anyone else. As Americans, you don’t call your friends “Americans,” you call him John or Joe, their name.” (Guo, UG)</p>
Feeling close	<p>“Yeah. I think we’ve already gone past the friendship stage, because our relationship is so good... We both call each other “bro” and whatnot. Our relationship is great.” (Liu, UG)</p>
Knowing that they can ask for favors or impose on each other	<p>“...if I don’t have a place to stay during the break, I’ll just be rude and ask him, hey, I gotta come over, and he’ll say yes. So it’s become a very wonderful relationship just like close brothers.” (Guo, UG)</p>
Frequency of interaction	<p>“Almost every day. Mostly face to face, with brief texts – like, I’m coming!” (Guo, UG)</p>
Mutual Understanding	<p>“We discuss all sorts of topics... We talk about everything, and then, even including what everyone is all interested in, that he is interested in. Actually, to tell the truth, there’s the stuff that he is interested in even if I am not, but I still listen to him talk about it. And then express interest. Then everyone in this way is very harmonious. And when I say something, he also shows interest.” (Xu, G)</p>

With deep friendships, respondents described talking with them about “everything” (Fu, Xu). While they may sometimes discuss cultural differences, especially in the beginning of their relationship, these are not the basis of their friendship and do not form the majority of their communication. Xu, a graduate student, mentioned that although he often talks with his deep

friends about things of interest, it is the ability to empathize and take interest in something even when one isn't that interested personally that makes a deep friendship work. He calls it a feeling of "mutual understanding."

As opposed to describing actual deep friendships with Americans, some of the respondents noted how they *do not* have these deep friendships, or how, like Rao said, the most difficult thing in her communication with Americans is building "true friendships." When respondents described the difficulty in making friends, it was this sort of friendship that they seemed to be longing for with Americans: friendships that go deeper, beyond a superficial niceness that Americans seem tend to offer. Although there may still be differences between Chinese-American deep friendships, and Chinese-Chinese friendships, respondents said that essentially, deep American friends have met the criteria of friendship, and thus they are essentially the same as Chinese friends. Another respondent described how his conversations with his friend are very wide-ranging, but often revolve around American and Chinese culture, and the differences. In this sort of conversation, both sides contribute to the explanations, so it is not just the American providing insider knowledge, but they explore things together. This is a great example of a deep friendship that is a model for others.

Besides conversations and the ability to talk deeply, respondents also noted significant experiences, which they have had with deep friends. These include: traveling together on a study abroad trip, playing sports, eating, talking, going to church, going home with them for holidays, going camping, going on overnight trips, living together, taking part in an alternative spring break, doing volunteer work, or doing something spontaneous. Zhen shared two examples, "something that made a deep impression on me was when we went out for some activities, for



example, we went camping and hiking, this kind of thing, this kind of activity is something that we both love to do.” Zheng added,

Doing volunteer work, this, this, the classmates doing volunteer work, mainly its, a volunteer class. At that time, there was a very close communication, it was like, doing volunteer work is everyone going together for a week, everyday living together, working together, doing everything together, you really get to know each other... (Zheng, UG)

Finally, as has been noted in other sections, one factor has been mentioned by respondents that represents their need and when experienced, deep friendships: doing something with each other outside of the classroom. In many cases an outside the classroom experience or event that was reported may have been the driving force that led to more in depth involvement. These connection points could be: sports and hobbies (including classes where they participated together in sports or exercise activities), having similar interests in study that encourage involvement or conversation beyond requirements (such as studying together, which leads to further involvement beyond studies), or similar tastes in media or part-time jobs. One respondent discussed how having multiple classes together was key to developing the relationship, as it increased the topics she could discuss with her American classmate. The same respondent also discussed how her willingness to try things with her American contacts led to more contact, whereas if she was reserved, Americans would seem to take it as a sign that she was uninterested, which led to less contact. Table 7 summarizes the types of responses that represent contact beyond the classroom.

**Table 7** *Summary of Contact that Occurs Outside the Classroom and Helps in Friendships*

Working out or taking a PE class	“Because when we went to that kind of class, we had the same hobby, I enjoy yoga, they enjoy it too, so we had a yoga class together, and that allowed us to work together. I talk with her (laugh), one person is above and one is below, a kind of support, also a
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	kind of yoga exercise...” (Wang, UG)
Having more than one class together	“But if they and I have another class together, then I can have the chance to talk, like, next class’s test, do you think it is going to be hard, or whatever. They seem to enjoy these kinds of interactions. (Rao, UG)
Having similar interests, sharing academic interests, enjoying the same entertainment, movies or TV	Wei, Yang, Guo

Tian, an undergraduate, explained her multiple connections with a friend, and how the relationship grew over time,

R: This girl, I met her at Mrs. E’s (a cafeteria where they worked together) and we have same class and work together too. Two and a half years now; I know her for a while. She has a lot of friends, and she’s nice, easy to talk to, I have a positive image of her. I see her once a week and we text sometimes too, and I see her every Monday night. We work at the Kansan. She works for news and advertising, but Monday night I work production and she will be there. But before we had photojournalism class so I met her two times a week and before that we work at Mrs. E’s – so we see each other two times a week.

I: So you’ve had 2 different jobs together and class together as well?

R: Yes.

All of these examples seem to indicate that having multiple connection points, and/or multiple places and contexts to connect, increased the chances of positive contact and friendship development between Americans and Chinese. Therefore, Chinese students should be encouraged to get involved in areas outside of their typical Chinese friendship circles: joining clubs, trying out sports or sports classes, taking a part-time job, etc., which would give them more opportunities to interact with Americans outside of a classroom environment.

While large amounts of communication do not necessarily lead to deep friendships, deep friendships seem to start with frequent communication, which leads to deep communication and feelings of togetherness, and contact that goes beyond the classroom and is situated around activities. These descriptions are encouraging because they show that deep friendships can be made between Americans and Chinese, and because they shed light on how they tend to occur. Although Americans may tend to keep relationships on a surface level, given the right circumstances (close proximity and shared activities outside of the classroom), deeper layers are feasible (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

***Interculturality.*** When it comes to describing Americans that they desire to communicate or make friends with, or have made deep friendships with, responses from participants especially revolved around issues related to intercultural competence. Sometimes these descriptions came in the form of describing what they like best about someone (usually someone that they describe as a close, or deep friend), but also it often comes when respondents described how they wish more Americans were, or described an ideal American. I have labeled the overall descriptions of these processes “interculturality,” to denote an ability on the part of the American to communicate well interculturally. This intercultural ability seems (in their opinion) to be second nature to the interviewees, at least in terms of recognizing its absence in their American counterparts. This is probably due to living outside of their own native cultural context, and thus experiencing a greater need to have their culture and their cultural identity validated by others (Bennett, 2004). Bennett also notes that being in a different cultural context can propel an individual to investigate own-cultural awareness and thus, cultural sensitivity. Types of interculturality as well as examples are summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8** *Examples of Interculturality*

Someone who has overseas experience	“He has some experience in China or something” (Song, UG)
Someone who wants to listen to what internationals have to say, openness	“Because he’s not a just ‘have American culture,’ and I’m not one of those only ‘understand Chinese cultures’” (Peng, UG)  “And then, when you say something, he wants to listen” (Song, UG)
Someone tolerant of mistakes	Even if I make a lot of mistakes, because he study (sic) another language too so he can understand how hard it is. (Song, UG)  Ren: He’s patient. And he can totally understand about the difficulties in learning language.
Someone who respects your point of view	“I wish, that is to say, I desire to communicate with the kind of American who will respect your ideas”(Song, UG)
Having a willingness to reach out to Chinese, to interact	“Americans if they want to make friends... if they want to make friends with Chinese students, there is no challenges of areas there. If the American part decided to make friends, I don’t see it as a challenging process. It is a challenging process for Chinese to make friends with Americans. So one thing is willingness.” (Wei, G)  “I want to communicate with the person who wants to communicate with me.” (Du, UG)
Someone who is open-minded and accepting of Chinese culture and ways of doing things; curiosity and open-mindedness	“I really wish to communicate with that kind of... a relatively open thinker, someone who can handle us and what we say, even when we say something wrong. They also should want to talk with us about their stuff and open their hearts. Have patience with their other classmates.” (Cao, UG)
Someone accepting, curious, not judgmental (not necessarily need to understand Chinese culture); patient	She’s really accepting, she doesn’t know a lot about Chinese culture, but she’s curious and doesn’t make judgments and also personality – she’s generally an easygoing person, really social, pretty nice to me. Personality is a big influence on which people you want to be friends with (Zhao, G)  “Not necessarily a definite interest in China, but a curiosity about anything.” (Zheng, UG)

The ability to pay attention to the other person's feelings	“Number one, they need to be able to pay attention to others' feelings. For example two different people are together, their cultures are different. You have to pay attention to what you say. (Liu, UG)
A lack of superiority – not just for Americans toward Chinese, but everyone toward everyone else, so that all can be even and equal	<p>He doesn't have a tendency to draw conclusions like that, he is very easy going, not that my position is definitely right... (Zheng, UG)</p> <p>A balanced attitude, I include Chinese in this, for example, with Indian people, with South Asians, South East Asians, to have a balanced kind of, not just like there's some obvious differences, although everyone has their own differences... (Zheng, UG)</p>

Qualities that the respondents liked in Americans that they developed friendships with were: an openness to other points of view, humility, a sense of humor, an interest in Chinese culture, patience, acceptability, openness, an easygoing attitude, being interested in them, easy to communicate with, curious, able to make connections, optimistic, and passionate.

To illustrate, Zheng, and undergraduate, described a long-term, and relatively unique friendship where over the course of getting to know each other, his friend has developed a desire to understand Chinese culture, where no desire existed previously:

Take my roommate's interest in China, he's lived with me, lived together with me for three years, but in the beginning he never said I want to go study Chinese, I want, I want, I want to do such and such. He just wanted to simply understand me, he wanted to, or rather we wanted to mutually, which is to say, we wanted to be friends to each other, therefore we learned about each other's culture... It wasn't like I have some purpose or ambition...

This is important because while an interest in China may not have been there at the start (and Americans can not necessarily be expected to all be interested in Chinese culture), an interest

developed through the friendship. While an American interest in Chinese culture is a desire of many Chinese, a more important quality is openness to other cultures, curiosity, and other motivation and skill-based intercultural traits which allow for friendship to blossom between the two groups.

### **Positive outcomes: gaining cultural awareness**

One of the benefits of intercultural interaction, particularly when someone is in an environment outside of their own culture, is the new awareness of one's home culture, an understanding that is unconscious to us most of the time (Bennett, 1986, 2004). Edward T. Hall likewise noted, "one of the most effective ways to learn about oneself is by taking seriously the culture of others" (1959). According to this logic, one of the indicators of positive cultural interaction should be this home cultural awareness. While this awareness was not a major theme of interviews with respondents, there were times where respondents made insightful remarks that indicated heightened awareness of culture and growing cognitive complexity. While this does not necessarily indicate integration, it does seem to be evidence of communication with Americans, some struggle to explain one's own culture, and make sense of the process of acculturation. This section analyzes the signs of self-awareness that respondents made in the course of interviews.

For some respondents the self-awareness was the realization that there is some onus on them to "open themselves up" (Ma), because, "you've come to the U.S. so you should open yourself up, if you're not open, its really hard to enter into the environment here." This realization is significant because some respondents, rightly or wrongly, tended to see Americans as the ones who ought to initiate with them (since they are the guests). Realizing that one can make a difference by choosing to take the attitude of a learner and initiator indicates awareness

of self and is an important step in adapting. This cultural awareness and the process of coming to it through engaging with other cultures was expressed clearly by Qiao, an undergraduate:

Anyway, this year, yeah this year, actually this semester, I had a very clear experience. I maybe, well its anyone, I guess when you are born in your own country's culture, you can't know what it isn't or what is special about it, or even what to ask, you can't go back and find out in the final analysis why something is the way it is, you can't pay attention to these details. On the contrary, when you go to a different culture, a different country, and people from other countries ask you why your culture is the way it is, you have to think, huh? You are suddenly struck dumb. It's like, I have never considered that before, I never even realized that. So I feel that going into a new environment, into another culture, you finally realize what you've lost in your own culture, or what you never paid attention to, the things you didn't know.

This description demonstrates an openness, not only to one's own culture, but to the new culture, since Qiao mentioned that it was through interacting with American culture that it happened.

These realizations that respondents sometimes expressed regarding their own cultural awareness, are positive benefits that need to be investigated more and encouraged in international students.

The realizations themselves, like the one above, should also be shared with acculturating internationals in order to help them realize the possible benefits of intercultural communication.

For those less motivated to interact with those who are not like themselves, these descriptions may help them to realize that learning about others and opening oneself up to other cultures actually helps you learn your own culture better. It does not have to be a process whereby you lose your original cultural identity, but rather can strengthen it. This is beneficial even if one is planning to return to one's own culture after graduation.

Zhao, a graduate student, touched on the connection between external characteristics and their influence on the perceptions that Americans may have. When asked about the negative communication from Americans, she responded:

Yes, sometimes I relate those to racism, but I try to be careful not to label people. I've heard some of the students don't like their Asian teaching assistants, because they complain about accents, and discriminate against them. [There are] A lot of people with other accents, why don't you complain about them? I personally don't think they are that difficult to understand and besides, \_\_\_\_ has an oral speaking test before you can get a teaching assistantship so they are kind of qualified.

***Improved intercultural sensitivity and competence.*** In spite of the fact that most Chinese have academic goals and responsibilities in addition to goals of self-actualization or a desire to experience something new, the responses of participants provided evidence that they have undergone, or are in the process of undergoing intercultural transformation as Brown and Brown described (2009). Brown and Brown's research indicates that after initial periods of stress and anxiety, intercultural transitions produced positive results such as: independence, strength, assertiveness and thoughtfulness. While the separation style of acculturation limits the positive effects of being in a new culture, this study shows that positive effects such as intercultural sensitivity can still be a result of intercultural sojourns. Other studies have shown similar positive results of intercultural sojourns (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2009).

**Summary of Friendship Development.** Like Schopenhauer's porcupines, many Chinese and Americans are attracted to each other, and yet at nearly the same time they can be repelled by each other due to a number of communication aspects. For Chinese international students on American campuses, the failure to develop good friendships with Americans tends to



lead to disappointment, as has long been noted by researchers of intercultural friendship building with Americans (Gareis, 2000; Gudykunst, 1985; Sias et al., 2008). Typically the fault is placed by interviewees, on American individualism and relational style, such as the American tendency to be outwardly nice without necessarily intending to initiate anything, or else in Americans lack of deep interest in developing intercultural relationships. While this study acknowledges those factors, it also points out other elements. American friendliness and self-disclosure, which first attracts Chinese, may be the very thing that leads them to disappointment later. This is because Chinese interpret American's initial outgoingness as though it were a declaration of friendship. Upon meeting later, a cold or lukewarm response from the American may cause confusion or disappointment from the Chinese, who expects the American to treat him or her as or more warmly than on initial encounters. Add to this seemingly strange behavior a lack of intercultural sensitivity and ability on the part of Americans, and a general passivity on the part of many Chinese, and many relationships that seem to start well, stall out or fail to develop, leaving too many Chinese friendless (at least with Americans).

However, there are some important insights regarding how to better facilitate positive interaction leading to friendships in the future. First, encourage Chinese to interact by providing more extra-curricular opportunities between Americans and Chinese. It is recommended that these are activities that Americans actually engage with, and that both Chinese and Americans are committed to. Secondly, Americans need training in intercultural competence. Specifically they need to realize that they are key to developing positive relationships by reaching out to Chinese, and being open to them, their culture, and culture differences in general. The question is, are many Americans motivated to interact with Chinese, or develop intercultural competence? Finally, Chinese also need training in intercultural competence skills. They need to go beyond

the skills of speaking English and classroom studying, and develop a willingness to step out, be with and learn from Americans even if they are not perfect or don't understand everything. In time they may find that they can also help Americans, and that Americans are interested in them.

### **Summary of Findings**

This chapter outlines the key themes: cultural differences that Chinese see as barriers to communication, acculturation strategies that Chinese use in adapting to American culture, and friendship development between Chinese and Americans. These themes are interrelated and are often mixed together in interviewees' responses. Broadly speaking, the interviewees negatively describe their communication and Chinese are dissatisfied with friendship building with Americans. The lack of quality communication with Americans both causes, and is caused by, the separation strategy of acculturation that many Chinese rely on.

A number of factors related to these issues are discussed, including shyness, the high number of Chinese on U.S. campuses, the formidable language barrier (and the separation caused by the need to study in the AEC), and a high focus on achieving academically. Although the study collected demographic and personal data, gender, age, and major were not found to be significant factors in this study. A number of strong negative perceptions of Americans were touched on, including the meta-perception that Chinese are stereotyped by Americans. In spite of these negative aspects, respondents also often expressed openness, desire to communicate with Americans, and expressed positive perceptions they had of Americans.

While most respondents recognized that they should be more outgoing with Americans, the majority felt that they were not able to overcome the barriers to do so. However, unanimously, the respondents wished that Americans were more outgoing and took more initiative to communicate with them, and felt that proactive American contact would be very

beneficial and appreciated. Some respondents went as far as to argue that it would be helpful if Chinese were forced to be in more intensive communication with Americans. In terms of the future outlook for designing programs to help facilitate intercultural communication and friendship building, this is an encouraging realization.

Finally, respondents point out that a key building block of deep friendship with Americans was their openness to other worldviews (usually not Chinese in particular). This is in stark contrast to the way that most Americans were perceived, however. The positive news here also, is that initiatives to help American students grow in intercultural sensitivity and competence would likely have a positive influence on communication, understanding, and friendship building.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the communication between Chinese international students and Americans, from the perspective of the Chinese. Analysis shows that communication between Chinese and Americans is generally unsatisfactory, marked by communication difficulties, lack of intercultural awareness and skill, and frustration that Americans are not more aware of, or interested in international students or other non-American perspectives. Secondary research questions for this study were to investigate the acculturation behaviors of Chinese internationals, and the friendship patterns between Chinese international students and Americans. The overall acculturation and adaptation strategy favored by Chinese, according to interviewees, is separation, meaning that they group together with other Chinese, and avoid communicating with Americans. At the same time, there are positive outcomes such as deep friendships and development of intercultural competence and sensitivity. This chapter summarizes the major findings, discusses theoretical contributions, makes recommendations, discusses the limitations of the study, and the future directions for research.

In answer to the overarching research question: *How do Chinese international students perceive intercultural communication between Chinese and American students on U.S. university campuses?* This study found that in general, Chinese internationals live separately from Americans, with infrequent contact. Chinese international students also perceive a lack of depth in communication with Americans, leading to an overall dissatisfaction with communication. These deficiencies are given a number of explanations, both intrinsic (such as the personality or motivation of Chinese), and extrinsic (such as the lack of openness that they notice many Americans exhibit). Participants in this study unanimously desired more quality communication

with Americans, and maintained positive attitudes toward Americans. The following three subsections will summarize the positive and negative aspects of intercultural communication between Chinese internationals and Americans and discuss the key contributions to the relevant literature of this study.

### **Positive Aspects**

This study found several positive aspects of intercultural communication between Chinese and Americans. Although intercultural communication between Chinese and Americans was often perceived as deficient both in quantity and quality, participants also perceived Americans as friendly, nice, and helpful, and all reported developing some level of friendship with Americans. Participants have many positive and non-stereotypical descriptions of Americans and responses that indicate a growing intercultural sensitivity on the part of the participants. These positive intercultural outcomes seem to indicate that Chinese international students are developing critical thinking and cognitive complexity, which are important constituents in intercultural competence (Bennett, 2009; Bennett, 1986, 2004).

### **Negative Aspects**

This study found that participants perceive a number of negative aspects of communication between Chinese and Americans. Participants describe a majority of their co-nationals as separating from Americans, and thus avoiding intercultural communication. Separation is believed to be due to (real or perceived) lack of ability in English, fear of failure, lack of motivation to communicate with Americans, pressure to succeed academically, fear of being separated from the home culture, and cultural differences. Participants also are influenced by negative perceptions of, and experiences with, Americans. These negative perceptions and experiences may be a further barrier to communication with Americans. Americans on average

are perceived as lacking interest in interacting with and getting to know Chinese, and communicate a lack of openness to other cultures and other points of view. In spite of their hard work learning English, nearly all participants believe that the language barrier is a significant hindrance for them, while cultural differences are viewed as a separate, and somewhat less significant hindrance.

### **Contributions to Acculturation and Friendship Building Literature**

This research strongly supports the conviction that adjusting to a new culture, including developing friendships with host nationals, is a rich, non-linear, process, that is moderated by individual and cultural factors (Berry, 2005; Gareis, 1995, 2000, 2012; Gu et al., 2009). In addition, the findings provide evidence to strengthen and clarify theory and literature related to acculturation and intercultural friendship development. This section will address areas where theory is strengthened or expanded.

### **Separation**

While acculturation theory recognizes the multiple factors involved in the choices to choose one strategy over another, and recent studies have emphasized the responses of host nationals as an important factor that may limit the available choices for a sojourner or migrant (Berry, 2005, 2008), acculturation is still conceptualized primarily as a desire or preference for either contact with host nationals, or maintaining one's heritage culture, resulting in four distinct possible outcomes (Berry, 2005). This study indicates that due to several possible constraints, preference for spending time with a certain group may not be the primary factor resulting in a choice of strategies. In particular, while separation is the main strategy engaged by Chinese internationals, there are different reasons for this result, which may indicate distinct categories as well.

The factors found in this study to be limiting or hindering acculturation are: motivation, language ability, cultural differences, personality, interpersonal skill, host national willingness and/or skill, and academic pressure. While motivation to interact with Americans is still the primary determinant for a strategy, many Chinese desire to interact often with Americans, but fail due to these other reasons. While sojourners may ultimately live separated from Americans, assuming that they desire to avoid Americans not only misrepresents their intentions, but also fails to capture the fullness of the intercultural experience that they do have. Thus it is suggested that acculturation may be re-conceptualized as a multi-step process that goes beyond the initial desire to contact with the host culture or maintain one's original culture. Likewise, "separation" may be re-conceptualized as multiple possible types of separation, as follows:

Separation 1 - results due to a lack of desire to contact with and learn the host culture (equivalent to the traditional description of separation).

Separation 2 – is understood as having a moderate to high desire for contact, but other (real or perceived) factors lead to separation.

Separation 2a – a lack of language ability or cultural adaptability leads to low and/or unsuccessful contact with host nationals, and results in a majority of time spent with co-nationals.

Separation 2b – shyness or other personality traits make connecting with host nationals challenging or impossible, thus leading to more time spent with co-nationals.

Separation 2c – host nationals' lack of interest or ability in engaging in intercultural communication lead to lack of warmth and depth in interactions, thus leading to more time spent with co-nationals.

Separation 2d – the felt pressures to succeed academically or professionally lead to a majority of time spent studying or working with little extra time or energy for engaging with host nationals.

This re-conceptualization of separation provides important knowledge for institutions interested in promoting international acculturation and intercultural contact, since individuals who choose the second form of separation (positively disposed toward Americans, and motivated to communicate) represent an opportunity to improve relations given adequate support. As it stands, participants' meta-perceptions are that Americans believe they do not want to communicate, which in many cases is false. Institutional interventions that go beyond language teaching, to promote contextualized culture investigation, intercultural training for internationals and Americans, friendship programs, interpersonal skill development, and mutual understanding, will help these motivated students move toward integration.

### **Assimilation and Intergroup Dynamics**

While the interviewees in this study reported that relatively few Chinese internationals actively pursued and engaged with Americans, those who were reported (or self-reported) as choosing the assimilation strategy of acculturation were discussed in a somewhat negative manner that indicated there may be strain between the Chinese ingroup and the assimilating individuals. This is due to a threat to the ingroup identity. What is significant to acculturation theory is that due to the pressure from the ingroup, Chinese internationals may feel that it is not acceptable to adapt too much, or engage too much with Americans. This could be due to fear of being seen as someone with intentions to leave the group, or someone who thinks they are better than other Chinese, and thus is seeking to engage in social mobility in order to improve their social status.



Practically speaking, this may be conceptualized as Separation strategy 2e, since the pressure from the ingroup to not engage too much with host nationals may lead some Chinese to choose separation and thus avoid the stigma of social mobility or possibly being cut off from co-nationals. Theoretically speaking, acculturation theory must be understood from an intergroup perspective, as Brown and Zagefka (2011) argue. They believe that intergroup dynamics affect acculturation strategies on several levels: intergroup attitudes, which affect acculturation preferences, perceived preferences of the outgroup on acculturation strategies and intergroup attitudes [something Berry has increasingly noted (2005) and other studies have since confirmed (Zagefka, Tip, Gonzalez, Brown, & Cinnirella, 2012)], the importance of the intergroup climate, and the importance of seeing acculturation as a developmental processes. This study provides evidence to support Brown and Zagefka's claim that acculturation is affected by intergroup attitudes.

Gu et al. (2009) state that the acculturation process is an intricate and complex one. Acculturation is shown in this study to be influenced by far more than just the desires to maintain one's home culture, and contact with the new culture. While having few positive adaptation effects, separation does result in positive intergroup effects, since separating individuals are not ostracized or cut off from their community. This may be more true than ever since today's Chinese international students may be more likely be headed back to China after graduation. That said, participants who are separated generally have fewer positive interactions with Americans, and have more negative attitudes toward Americans. So while separation should be seen as not necessarily just a lack of desire to have contact with Americans - as there may be many other reasons for this - it still is not the most successful strategy in terms of the positive effects that an international experience potentially has to offer. The four acculturation strategies,

while helpful to understand the amount of contact a sojourner has with home culture and the host culture, is not necessarily descriptive of their motivation for using that strategy, or their desire for contact with Americans.

In terms of Chinese international students, it requires a unique individual to maintain academic requirements and grades, while also spending time in extracurricular activities necessary to develop friendships with Americans, cultivate a willingness to speak English, having an outgoing personality, being inquisitive about new things (even if others are not inquisitive about her or his home culture), and being willing to try new things and adapt to American culture! Expecting even gifted individuals to arrive with this ideal list of characteristics is unrealistic. At the same time, American students can positively support the integration of Chinese, but many of them are also not equipped or skilled enough to do so. This underscores both the complexity of the situation, as well as the need for intercultural training both for international students and Americans.

### **Practical Implications: Cultural Adaptation and Intercultural Competence**

This study's interviewees identify cultural differences, individual factors, as well as attitudes that contribute to separation, or hinder the communication between Chinese internationals and Americans. Analysis has confirmed that there are indeed cultural differences in communication styles, values, communication norms, and preferences that lead to misunderstandings, anxiety, and a tendency toward separation from Americans. Yet, participants also indicate they have adapted to American culture and imply that they do not need to adapt further. These reported problems and beliefs about acculturation represent a contradiction.

Clearly, international students in the United States have a great deal they must adapt to: language, food, customs, climate, educational expectations and styles, detachment from family,

friends, and other familiar referents, etc. Sojourning individuals all face adapting to these basics and must do so to one degree or another. To take one example, adapting to the more interactive, dialogic educational style can be easy and successful, a failure, or an ongoing challenge, depending on the individual. Each of the changes or adaptations that comes about through the sojourn is what participants refer to when they speak of “adapting<sup>3</sup>.” Each individual is more or less successful in doing so, and these clearly are important elements of the process of acculturation and adaptation. Any international student who is successfully navigating the American societal and educational system should be recognized as having made important and successful adaptations, although not all are doing so in the same areas or to the same degrees.

However, as Edward Hall and others have noted, the hidden aspects of culture: values, norms, and beliefs, are neither easily recognized or changed (Bennett, 2004; Deardorff, 2006; 1981; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). In fact, the process of having values and beliefs challenged is a stressful and anxiety inducing process (Gudykunst, 1998, 2005b), which is referred to as acculturative stress (Berry, 2005) or culture shock (Lustig & Koester, 2010). Adjustment and acculturation, in this sense, is an ongoing process that takes years, especially when the transition is between two relatively different cultures (Berry, 1997; Hall, 1981; Kim, 2012). This aspect of acculturation, which appears to be largely missing from respondents’ descriptions of cultural differences and adjustment to the United States, is essential for the development of intercultural competence (Bennett, 2009; Bennett, 1986, 2004; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Bennett argues that it is imperative to develop an awareness of one’s own values, beliefs, and behaviors as shaped by the social and cultural context in which one was raised, so that one can then begin to envision alternatives to them (Bennett, 2009). In other

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<sup>3</sup> The Chinese term “shiyiing” (适应), is a vague one that just means to adjust or adapt, and could as easily refer to one’s adaptation to a new job, or a new city as it could a new culture.

words, until intercultural sojourners see their cultural perspective as but one of many equally complex perspectives, they will not be able to fully evaluate and adapt to other cultures. Bennett finds that information can be obtained and understood about a culture all while a person can still be firmly within the Minimization stage (of ethnocentrism). Likewise, people can obtain some of the linguistic or behavioral skills of a new culture without having the needed feelings for how to act in culturally appropriate ways. Thus he explains that an acceptance of value relativity is essential for development of ethnorelativism (Bennett, 2009).

I believe there are at least three reasons why Chinese internationals do not typically conceptualize acculturation and adaptation to American culture in this deeper sense. First, lacking ongoing intercultural training, many international students may also lack a full understanding of what culture is, and how it constitutes our identities and influences behaviors. Likewise, they may lack an understanding and appreciation of cultural relativity. Second, due to the global nature of English, the early age at which most Chinese begin to study English, and the saturation of Chinese media with American cultural products, Chinese internationals may find that American culture holds relatively little mystery to them, and that it is therefore easy to adjust to. Weng's (2013) study found that young Chinese in China tended to make faulty assumptions about Americans based on media interpretations of what Americans are like. Third, compared to their American counterparts, Chinese internationals already have made major adjustments, behaviorally and attitudinally: they have traveled the world, expended years studying and preparing to come to the U.S., and accommodated in ways that should be more appreciated. The lack of intercultural and global awareness of Americans pointed out by participants in this study may influence the extent to which many Chinese internationals are willing to acculturate and adapt further. Although it is not essential to the integration strategy of acculturation, or the

development of ethnorelativism (Bennett, 2009; Bennett, 1986, 2004), if Americans were more open and interested in developing intercultural competence and sensitivity, integration for Chinese internationals would likely be a more natural possibility as well.

Instead, Chinese internationals seem to approach Americans and American culture with caution, and I suggest there may be an either/or proposition when it comes to cultural adjustment. The majority of Chinese maintain mostly Chinese cultural contacts, making necessary and acceptable outward cultural adjustments such as educational, linguistic, and climatological, but meanwhile maintaining essentially Chinese characteristics that are important to them or the Chinese community (but which contribute to their separation from Americans). The other option for Chinese is to seek to “assimilate” to American culture by preferring American contacts to Chinese, and possibly choosing to dress more American, hang out primarily with Americans, and be as American as possible, while shunning Chinese identifiers such as speaking Chinese (sacrificing their Chinese identity and the social support of the community). While both strategies have some positive outcomes (either maintaining the home culture and identity or gaining the new culture and identity), neither strategy combines the positive outcomes that are possible with integration, or the development of intercultural competence, or multilingual, or multicultural identities. Chinese international students need to understand that adapting to American culture in the positive sense indicated by becoming interculturally competent, or an integration strategy, is not the same as assimilating. Assimilation is when someone gives up their original values, beliefs, and behaviors, and takes on those of the new culture. Adaptation and integration is an “extension” of one’s beliefs and behavior, so one does not need to lose his/her primary cultural identity (Bennett, 2009). This conceptualization is an additive way of conceptualizing integration or a “bicultural” outcome.

Research regarding acculturation and adaptation indicates that integration has the most positive outcomes for the sojourner or migrant, both psychologically and socioculturally (Berry et al., 2006). In terms of the host culture's preference for immigrants' and sojourners' strategies, assimilation and integration are clearly preferred over the separation or marginalization strategies (Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998; Zagefka et al., 2012). Cultures that are more open to multiculturalism, such as Canada or The Netherlands appreciate integration the most. Imamura (2011) found that American students in a large midwestern university were the most socially attracted to assimilated, and then integrated Chinese students, and least socially attracted to separated and marginalized Chinese students. In terms of willingness to communicate with Chinese students, there were no significant differences between the assimilated and integrated students, who were both judged as desirable to communicate with by Americans (2011).

### **Language**

The interviewees in this study indicated that struggles with communicating in English were of primary importance to them. This is not surprising, considering that language is a recurring factor in previous research on acculturative stress, friendship building, and acculturation and adaptation, especially for Asian sojourners in Anglophone countries (Brown, 2008; Butcher & McGrath, 2004; Fritz et al., 2008; Gareis, 2000; Greenland & Brown, 1999; Jou & Fukada, 1997; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sam, 2001; Sias et al., 2008; Tseng & Newton, 2002). It is important that Chinese internationals develop proficiency in the host cultural language because it gives them confidence to engage with host nationals, and secondly because a strong ability in the host language gives them the best basis from which to succeed academically. However, this study also reveals other factors in the language-learning dilemma.

First, an over-focus on language learning, especially if it is in the context of the more traditional-style of learning that many Chinese institutions typically favor<sup>4</sup>, may lead to further separation from host nationals, and participation in the language as it is actually used in communication. Secondly, seeing culture and language as distinct elements is an oversimplification that could be compounding the problem by leading to more separation. Benjamin Whorf recognized the connection between language and culture (Whorf, 1956), and while most scholars today qualify Whorf's claim that a culture is knowable through its language, few deny the connection between language and culture. Yet, foreign languages are often taught as separate from culture (Corbett, 2003). The example of American humor pointed out by participants in this study highlights the role that culture plays within language and communication, and vice-versa. In order to understand and appreciate humor, subtle variances in nonverbal communication, close familiarity with historical contexts and current events, as well as encyclopedic understanding of societal workings are needed, regardless of whether all the words and grammar are perfectly understood (Bell, 2007a, 2007b; Cheng, 2003). As Bell notes, "It is now widely recognized that effective communication requires much more than knowledge of linguistic forms. Contextual factors, such as time, place, and participants, as well as variations in culturally situated background knowledge, all influence the way we speak and understand each other, and these are constantly in the process of being negotiated and constructed in and through social practice" (2007a). Finally, this study finds that although language is of extreme

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<sup>4</sup> In terms of methods that Chinese primary schools, high schools, and universities often use to teach foreign language, and English specifically, imitation and memorization is one of the most common (Cheng, 2012), which may relate to the struggle that Chinese have in adapting to American classrooms and discussion-debates, and also equates to the "communicative" method of learning English described by Corbett (2003). As Jin explains, the learning environment in China is similar to the apprentice model used to teach art students in ancient times. He notes a saying, "memorizing three hundred Tang Dynasty poems will enable you to create poems even if you could not write any before" (Jin, 1992).

importance to Chinese internationals, it may be less essential to friendship formation than is commonly assumed. Several respondents noted that it was through the friendship building process that their language improved, and with the help of their American friends. No participant reported an increase in friendships with Americans as a result of improved language ability.

## **Friendship**

The results of this study indicate several key factors when it comes to friendship development between Chinese internationals and Americans. These keys are having shared experiences, American intercultural sensitivity, and American willingness to maintain the relationship beyond the initial positive experiences.

Although the ability to talk with American friends was found to be one of the key characteristics of friendship, participants with deeper friendships also noted that when their language was at the nascent stages of development, they did not usually have excellent grasp language. On the contrary, their American friends helped them develop their language proficiency through questions, sharing, and corrections of mistakes. Also, especially in the early stages of friendship development, key experiences were noted as essential to friendship development. Shared experiences such as cooking together, living together, or traveling together allow a context for the friendship to develop without necessarily needing superior language skills to mediate the communication. Additionally, shared experiences outside of the educational environment may promote friendship that endures since the experience is not limited by the duration of a semester or a school year.

Participants in this study had a hard time maintaining contact with and developing friendships with Americans over time, in spite of positive initial interactions. This lack of



ongoing contact is a serious flaw in friendship building process and is part of what leads participants to view Americans as disingenuous. Although dynamic American friendship patterns, a lack of emphasis on long-term friendship (related to individualism), and non-intersecting social worlds may have a lot to do with the lack of follow-through on the part of Americans, the fact remains that initially positive experiences with Americans, such as with roommates or fellow students in the classroom, were discussed with a degree of dejection because the relationships often withered over time. This tendency toward shallow friendships with Americans and the subsequent perceptions of Americans is a theme that confirms previous research on intercultural friendship, particularly between sojourners from Asian, or non-Anglophone counties and Americans (Gareis, 2000, 2012; Sias et al., 2008). Gareis (2012) found that East Asian sojourners not only had significantly fewer friendships than sojourners from Anglophone countries, but that they were also much less satisfied with those friendships.

Participants in this study widely agreed that relations with Americans and friendship development would be greatly increased if Americans were more open to diverse viewpoints and were more interculturally sensitive (this extends the finding from Sias et al. (2008) who found that Americans' past intercultural experience was a predictor of friendships with internationals). As noted above, Chinese international students must adapt and accommodate to many factors in order to successfully live and thrive academically in the United States. The participants in this study did not usually believe that Americans should adapt to Chinese ways, or learn more about Chinese culture (although it can be helpful). Rather, they felt that being more genuinely open to other worldviews, and less intent on maintaining the illusion of American superiority would be the most welcome changes that Americans could make. Bennett argues that host families in international receiving programs often cloak an ethnocentric Minimization attitude behind an

outward acceptance of cultural differences (Bennett, 2004). This is because they are motivated by sharing the host country's way of life with the international students, assuming that, "the student will appreciate that way of life once he or she sees what it is" (p. 3). A similar assumption may be behind the closed attitudes that participants in this study encountered.

### **Recommendations**

In addition to theoretical findings, this study has practical implications for those involved in higher education, international education, and for Chinese international students themselves. It is hoped that these recommendations may be used to develop intercultural training programs and courses, or that they be incorporated into training programs currently used on American campuses or as pre-departure training courses overseas.

#### **Recommendations for Chinese International Students**

This study recognizes the struggles that Chinese international students face in studying in the United States: linguistic, educational, social, and cultural. In light of these difficulties, the successes and failures that have been reported here, and previous research, the following careful recommendations for Chinese international students are suggested.

First, it is important to realize that culture and the process of acculturating and adapting is harder and more time-consuming than it may seem. The many cultural differences and communication difficulties that block the communication between Chinese and Americans are indicators of deeper values, norms, and beliefs, which are usually unseen. Becoming "adapted" to another culture requires gaining and awareness of your own values, beliefs, and norms, and then "extending" them through adapting to those in the new culture. It is important to realize that this can be done without losing your primary cultural identity or assimilating to American culture (Bennett, 2004; Berry, 2005; Berry et al., 2006; Zagefka et al., 2012).

Second, whether the support systems are available that facilitate interaction with Americans or not, it is ultimately up to you to engage with Americans frequently, and make what is strange become familiar. While maintaining your Chinese identity and place within the Chinese community is important to continued well-being, it is also possible to do so while pursuing frequent contact and communication with Americans. Some suggestions follow.

- 1) Choose to live with an American roommate. If possible, live with Americans during all the years as a student. If a roommate situation is difficult or unacceptable, keep trying. Resist the urge to move in with Chinese because it is more fun, or easier. Instead, encourage your Chinese friends to get an American roommate as well, or perhaps consider joining with several Americans and internationals to create an intercultural living arrangement.
- 2) Get engaged with Americans from your major. Americans may relate in a friendly way with classmates, but don't necessarily see them as friends until they do things together outside of the school environment.
- 3) Take the initiative to join clubs or other student organizations that interest you. It can be great to join an international student or Chinese student group, but do not limit yourself to these groups. By joining clubs or organizations that Americans are in, you will develop a sense of familiarity with them outside of the classroom. As you engage with them in multiple contexts, the more ongoing friendships may develop with them. This is especially important at the beginning of your sojourn.
- 4) Find study partners in your major, or who are in a class with you and see if they would like to study together. This will help several problems: it will help you achieve academically, since Americans may be able to help you understand things that you might have missed in class due to language problems, and it may also provide a place for you to help your partner as well.
- 5) Stay patient. Stick with your relationships and Americans will slowly accept you. Americans need to know that you want to be friends with them. If you wait for them to

contact you, they may assume you want to be hang out only with other Chinese. 6) Seek to engage with American media (including on the Internet), and with Americans via social media or other forms of mediated communication. Some research indicates that students who are well-adjusted to American culture and have more contact with Americans also engage with American media and social media (Li, Liu, Wei, & Lan, 2013).

Third, remember that although learning English well is an essential part of adapting to the U.S. and gaining confidence communicating with Americans, studying English from a book, with other Chinese, will only get you so far. Work to develop communication habits that enable you to engage with Americans. American host nationals are your greatest source of linguistic and cultural knowledge, which are intertwined together. As you interact with Americans, ask them questions about what they are doing, or why they do things as they do. They may not understand all of the reasons, just as you may not understand your own culture, but as you dialogue about these things, you will develop better understandings of what is occurring, and you may come to appreciate it and the language better. As you study American culture – friendship patterns, communication style, contextual factors that help to understand humor, etc. – these “non-linguistic” issues will aid in understanding language and in communicating, getting humor, creating a sense of familiarity and we-ness. It is very important to note that some of the most successful Chinese international students have found that their language has improved the most after developing friendships with Americans.

### **Recommendations for Higher Education Administrators**

Although this research focused on the perceptions of Chinese international students, and did not specifically investigate the programs or support that participants received through international programming, nonetheless, experiences and perceptions from participants often

took into account these factors. As such, this study has several recommendations for international programs, higher education administrators, and to a lesser extent, American professors.

First, despite reporting some participation in programs intended for friendship building and connecting with Americans, attitudes toward these programs were lukewarm. On the other hand, some participants joined groups outside of the university setting, including church groups, and volunteer English discussion groups, which they found to be very helpful and appreciative of when they were appropriately and sensitively run (i.e.: with the intention to serve rather than manipulate international students). In the many positive experiences, the presence of ongoing, caring support from older Americans seems to have been one factor that was viewed positively. While it is important for internationals to develop friendships with their peers, neither American students nor internationals may be equipped relationally, or interculturally to develop friendships without more structure. However, friendship development between Americans and internationals has been successful when activities and experiences are provided for the two groups to participate together. Bennett recommends ropes courses and other challenge-type activities for developing intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2004), and this research finds that camping trips, alternative spring breaks, volunteer work, or other experiential activities help to facilitate friendship and help transcend and bridge language differences.

Second, American higher education needs to move beyond considering international students as the only ones who should adapt. International students already make a number of important and significant adaptations and accommodations: linguistic, geographic, cultural, environmental, and educational. The challenge for international students is to continue to understand and appreciate American culture and society, which happens best in a supportive and

open environment. Results from this study indicate that most Chinese internationals desire to have greater contact with Americans, but have trouble doing so, for a variety of reasons, chief among them being that American students seem to be closed-minded. Happily, more and more American institutions are adopting goals of helping students become sensitive and able to adapt to diverse contexts (ie: develop intercultural competence) as part of their mission ("KU core: Goals, learning outcomes, and curricular criteria," 2012). In order to not merely pay lip service to these ideals, American institutions need to devote serious attention to equipping American students interculturally. This is no simple matter, and therefore may require a variety of designs to execute.

At present, there seems to be a heavy reliance in American higher education on study abroad to help Americans develop international experience and intercultural competence. Proponents of study abroad point to research that shows that study abroad leads to a number of positive benefits to the student such as: a deeper understanding and respect for global issues, more favorable attitudes toward other cultures, stronger intercultural skills, among others (Salisbury et al., 2009). Study abroad can certainly be a platform for powerful international experiences, and intercultural transformation. However, like international students in the United States, just because the potential for intercultural experience is there does not mean that it is happening. To begin with, as of 2011, only 9% of American college students studied abroad, only 3% of those were abroad for a year or more (the rest were abroad for a semester or less), and 53% studied in Europe or Russia rather than in other parts of the world ("Open doors data," 2012). Research regarding who studies, or intends to study abroad shows that going abroad is significantly limited by financial ability, which may be partly responsible for prevalence of

whites who study abroad (Salisbury et al., 2009). So clearly, not all students go, or could go abroad, even though many of them would like to.

Moreover, accounts (Lederman, 2007; Myers, 2012) regarding the actual experiences of Americans abroad is not encouraging. Lederman explains that many of the study abroad programs, especially larger programs, where many American students live together, take classes together, and play together, leave students “on their own” in terms of developing their intercultural awareness. The result is often that little intercultural development actually occurs, especially on shorter trips.

Kininger reports that today’s study abroad programs are more likely to be one semester instead of two, that language learning is less of a focus for many students, that students are likely to surround themselves with digital devices (likely tuned in to American media), that students are more likely to move about rather than establish connections in their primary location, that they are likely to use English with host nationals, and that they are likely to entertain numerous visitors from home (2008). Pedersen (2009) conducted an experiment with three groups of students, one who went overseas and took an intercultural effectiveness and diversity-training course, including cultural immersion, guided reflection, and intercultural coaching, a second who went overseas on the same study abroad but had no intercultural intervention, and a third, which was the control group. Pre- and post-testing showed that the second two groups showed similar results, including a lack of significant intercultural growth, and a lack of growth in intercultural awareness and sensitivity, while the first group, which received simultaneous training, made significant gains. Pedersen concludes that it is not sufficient to send students to study abroad without training intentionally focused on intercultural effectiveness.

While study abroad should continue to receive support and attention (especially as students receive intercultural training, or perhaps are required to use the study abroad time to conduct research or create a meaningful account of their learning upon returning home), an implicit question related to internationals and Americans is: why can't American students have more intercultural experiences while at home, on their own campuses? After all, if someone is unable or unwilling to engage a foreigner here in their own country, why would they be more likely to do so when they go abroad?

Clearly more needs to be done to help American students receive intercultural training, both for their own intercultural development, and for the well-being and positive experiences it would provide for international students in the United States. While simply requiring intercultural courses for all students may not be realistic, the creation of a core curriculum that meets the goals of intercultural education should be developed. Perhaps one dimension of that core curriculum could include intercultural relationships, either abroad, or with international students on their campus. In order for this to happen successfully, faculty will themselves need to be trained in intercultural competence and structures, such as support for intercultural dorms, should be prevalent (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). Ways should be formulated that encourage Americans to participate in these and other programs, without discriminating against internationals by offering an incentive to Americans without offering the same or similar incentives to internationals.

Also, it has been proposed that multicultural programs may be most effective when they occur in the context of an academic program, so that those with similar majors may have the opportunity to take their relationship beyond the educational environment (Sakurai, McCall-Wolf, & Kashima, 2010). This study indicates that familiarity and commonalities are important



parts of the early stages of intercultural friendship development, therefore having people in friendship programs that they recognize from their own major may be very important.

Third, as Americans receive intercultural training, it is important for them to realize that the best acculturation strategy for internationals is integration (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). While most internationals desire to choose integration, this strategy also depends partially on the host culture, as this study and others have shown (Berry, 2005, 2008). In order to support integration, Americans need to become more tolerant of cultural and linguistic differences, more open to differing worldviews, and more willing to communicate with those who represent non-mainstream American cultures. All of these goals can be achieved through intercultural training and facilitation of intercultural contact. Future attempts to encourage broad intercultural training should consider developing an intercultural competence certificate that could be gained through a combination of training, intercultural intercourse, and a capstone project.

### **Strengths and Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study has ideological and methodological strengths due to my prior experiences and competencies. Having lived for close to a decade in China and achieved a strong proficiency in the language, this project relies heavily on my interpretations of the respondents' interviews in light of the linguistic, cultural, educational, and societal contexts. As an international student myself while in China, I am able to identify with many of the struggles that Chinese and other internationals face, especially considering the cultural and linguistic differences between the two countries. During my time in China, I had the opportunity to interview over 700 Chinese college students, as part my university teaching. Through these and other experiences, I gained anthropological insights into the lives of high school, college, and graduate students. My experiences in China were the engine that drove my interest in intercultural communication, and

the theories that explain culture and intercultural relations. The insights I gained and continue to gain ring true today as I interact with Chinese international students here in the United States. In an attempt to capture insights and experiences that are most pivotal to participants, approximately two-thirds of the interviews for this study were conducted in Chinese.

As an American, who has been re-integrated back into the United States over the last five years, I am able to empathize not only with the Chinese students, but with Americans as well. This perspective is essential to fairly understand the reasons and actions, and interpret the motivations and contexts of American students in relation to their Chinese counterparts.

However, I recognize that my prior experiences and insights may work as terministic screens to sway my interpretations of what is being described by respondents, or what is happening in this context (Burke, 1966). In an attempt to reduce this influence, and allow the participants' perceptions to drive this study, I used a variety of checks. I first framed the research in relevant literature and theory. A native Chinese speaker conducted the Chinese language interviews in order to implicitly assure participants that they were being understood and that they could speak freely and without accommodation. Native Chinese assistants were enlisted to transcribe the audio, but I analyzed the transcriptions, and I translated relevant Chinese excerpts into English. In order to assure that translations were accurate, another Chinese assistant was enlisted to check the translations for accuracy and suggestions were adopted into the translations. Additionally, throughout the conceptual and pre-proposal phase, the pilot study, and the data collection and analysis, I engaged my advisor, and other Chinese professors and colleagues to scrutinize my interpretations.

This study sought the perspective of Chinese international students because of their growing number worldwide and on many American campuses, and because their perspective is

vital to establishing successful programs that can work for Chinese and Americans. However, the experiences, perceptions, and viewpoints are not necessarily representative of all Chinese on this campus or others, or of all international students. One variable that could affect outcomes is the number of Chinese. On a campus with significantly fewer Chinese students, perceptions may turn out to be very different. Likewise, the results may not generalize to non-academic context.

This study sought emergent themes regarding the perceptions and experiences of Chinese international students' communication with Americans. This study provides needed details pertaining to interaction between Americans and Chinese, perceptions of Americans, and Chinese international students' acculturation styles. In addition, it serves as the basis from which future work may further these and other themes.

The analysis of responses in this study led to discussion of acculturation and adaptation styles. However, none of the participants themselves, nor the other Chinese they described fit the acculturation style of marginalization (where there is a lack of desire to contact with the host culture, and to maintain relationships with the home cultural community). Theoretically, and according to prior research, marginalized individuals do exist, although likely only a small minority (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2006). By their very definition, marginalized people would be difficult to investigate, since they do not have or desire contact with either cultural group, but instead are on the margins. However, future research should attempt to investigate the experiences of marginalized individuals. As the well-being of marginalized individuals is significantly compromised, they are often the ones most in need of academic and institutional resources, but the least likely to get it. Future research should also investigate specifically what the Chinese international students' experiences have been regarding training that was received before and after arriving in the United States.

Although friendship development was a major theme in this research, it was not a systematic focus of interviews with participants. This is due to so few participants in the pilot study having had significant friendship experiences. However, future work may endeavor to enlist participants who claim to have had friendships with Americans, which will further enlighten the themes related to friendship. Future explorations of intercultural friendship development, especially between Asians and Americans should pay close attention to the factor of language. While some findings infer that language may limit intercultural friendship development (Gareis, 2012), this study shows that it is a complex and perhaps contradictory connection. While Asian sojourners in the United States feel insecure in their English, and note the ways that they are hindered by it, the findings here indicate that friendships can develop successfully prior to (and my help facilitate) the Asian sojourner's English competency.

Conclusions about the interactions with and perceptions of Americans must remain tentative in this study since only the Chinese viewpoint was considered. This is intentional, since few studies have sought to study the intercultural communication from this perspective, and I had the capability to analyze the research. However, examining the perspectives of Americans regarding their experiences with Chinese would also be fruitful, and would provide additional appreciation of the positive and negative factors that influence intercultural communication. This additional research could be conducted in the context of friendship programs, intensive training programs.

## **Conclusion**

This study is an investigation into the perceptions of Chinese international students regarding their intercultural communication experiences with Americans, on American university campuses. This study looks especially at the acculturation and adaptation strategies

that Chinese students employ, and the influences that those strategies have on friendship development between Americans and Chinese. The findings in this study indicate that there are connections between acculturation and adaptation strategies, intergroup dynamics, intercultural competence, and friendship development.

At the heart of this research is a quandary. Many Chinese international students come to the United States needing to study language before they can enter the larger university. Chinese international students need (and typically desire) to have quality contact with Americans. Receiving intensive language training that is provided through intensive English institutes, literally separates them from American students. Physical separation in the first part of their sojourn naturally leads to a separation strategy long term.

While some internationals manage to successfully interact and develop friendships with Americans after they graduate from applied English centers, it is very difficult to make this transition once patterns of interacting, and living with other internationals have been established in the first months of the sojourn. This predicament cannot be easily resolved. But based on the findings here, my personal experience, literature review, and theoretical background, some suggestions are made.

Since motivation to interact with Americans, which is perhaps the most important factor in acculturation and friendship development, is at least relatively high for most Chinese, failure to establish positive, long-lasting relationships, and integrate with American culture is due to a variety of other reasons: physical separation, the pressure to achieve academically, lack of understanding of acculturation, intergroup identity threat, stereotypes, lack of interpersonal or intercultural competence (for Americans and Chinese), and the language-culture barrier. None of these issues will be resolved with the turn of a key, or by simplistic programming, but I have

identified ways that programs can be developed in order to facilitate intercultural training, quality intercultural contact, and friendship development, all of which will lead to higher levels of well-being for Chinese internationals, and a host of other positive outcomes for Chinese and Americans.

As higher education in the United States continues to “internationalize” by recruiting international students from China, Asia generally, and elsewhere, it is imperative that American institutions do not simply consider the presence of international students on American campuses to achieve the goals of internationalization. If true internationalization is to be achieved, all students should be gaining more diverse viewpoints and experiences. Currently, international students are exposed to American ways, which benefits them, and American campuses receive international students that mostly pay out of state tuition, which benefits the schools and helps alleviate current budget pressures. However, the ideals of internationalization call for all students to gain competence and global perspectives. This does not seem to be happening, nor will it if critical steps to facilitate interaction and openness between both sides are taken.

First, attempts to foster integration between Chinese internationals and Americans must begin at the start. Perhaps the best way to do this is to support intercultural living arrangements, in tandem with intercultural training for American and Chinese participants. While quite a few of the interviewees in this study lived at one time or another with an American, few continued to do so, even if it was relatively successful. Institutional support for intercultural roommates is essential to help more of these relationships continue on long-term, and to blossom. Another possible variation would be to create intercultural suites where several Americans, Chinese, and/or other internationals all lived together. In this situation, an integrated acculturation strategy would be built right into the relationship. All roommates could rely occasionally on co-

nationals, and anxiety would be likely be reduced since all the pressure to live and interact interculturally would be diffused.

Secondly, international programs like friendship programs, were found in this study to have poor to moderate success actually helping Americans and Chinese develop friendships. A way to improve them would be to coordinate the programs with majors and colleges within the university. This study found that finding more areas to overlap with an American, especially outside of the classroom, was important for friendship. In addition, having a natural connection was another way that friendships initially began. Dovetailing attempts to match up students with majors would help meet both of these goals, and it would help facilitate future interactions as partners would naturally see each other in the course of their academic lives.

Third, vital intercultural programming can be developed that facilitates communication, experiences, cultural exploration, and mutual understanding. An evening course that combines intercultural learning, experiences, diverse viewpoints, large and small group discussions, and games would be one possible way to achieve this. Since stimulus for both international and American participants in this course may be needed, credit could be earned that would go toward a certificate in intercultural competence, or a capstone experience. Internationals and Americans should receive the same or similar external benefits from the course.

Fourth, although internationals may seem to be the ones who do not “fit” in with Americans, they in fact have made giant steps to accommodate to the United States, and Americans. To bridge help the gap, Americans also are greatly in need of intercultural training. Programs should be inclusive enough to pull in diverse groups rather than just the few who are normally interested in international students. Participation in an intercultural program or course

like the one described above, could be used as a prerequisite for study abroad, or for a capstone program.

Finally, assessment should be done to determine ways to integrate intensive English training so that the separation between Chinese studying English and the rest of the student body would not be so large and explicit. Principles of inclusion perhaps may be gleaned from studying the lessons learned by special education in American schools. While the nature of university classrooms may be sufficiently unique as to rule out inclusion as it is carried out in American public schools, the principles may lead to useful adaptations in this context.

This study has sought to understand the perceptions of the communication between Chinese international students and Americans, on American university campuses. I have taken the findings gleaned from respondents and used them to confirm and enlarge theories related to intercultural communication and intergroup communication, and made recommendations based on the findings, which may be useful for Chinese international students and university administrators. I hope that as others and I seek to apply these principles, that more and more Chinese international students will be enabled to live integrated lives during their stay in the United States, and that more Americans will have the desire to reach out to them.



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## **Appendix 1**

### **Informed Consent Statement**

#### **Examining Intercultural Communication Between Chinese Internationals and Americans**

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

#### **Purpose Of This Study**

The purpose of this research project is to better understand how Chinese international students and Americans interact. I hope to gain a better understanding of the ways that Chinese and Americans communicate, what barriers prevent communication, and how to help facilitate better communication and friendship.

#### **Procedures**

You will first be asked to complete a short questionnaire about your demographic information such as age, gender, and education, and your experiences. Next you will be engaged in an interview regarding your experiences interacting with Americans. It is estimated that this will take approximately 45 minutes of your time. With your consent, this discussion will be audio recorded. This recording will be used by the researchers only; will be free from any information that might identify you, and will be stored in a locked cabinet. As this discussion will be recorded, you will have the option of using a pseudonym, if you so desire. You may also ask for the recording to be stopped at any time, however, the interview will not proceed. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed by professional transcribers and will be used solely by the primary researcher. After the research project is over, the recordings will be destroyed.

After completion of the interview you will be given a \$10 gift card that can be used at any KU Dining facility. Investigators may ask for your social security number in order to comply with federal and state tax and accounting regulations.

#### **Risk and Benefits**

There are no overt risks associated with your participation. However, there is a slight possibility that answering some questions about your experiences with Americans may make you uncomfortable. Although participation may not directly benefit you, the information you provide

will be beneficial to understanding the interactions between Chinese and Americans, and possibly will help create better programs on university campuses.

### Payment To Participants

Participants in this study will be offered a \$10 gift certificate good for all KU dining establishments. Investigators may ask for your social security number in order to comply with federal and state tax and accounting regulations.

### Participant Confidentiality

Your name will not be associated in any way with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Data will only be reported in an aggregated manner. The researcher(s) will use a study number or a pseudonym instead of your name. The researchers will not share information about you unless required by law or unless you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

### Refusal to Sign Consent and Authorization

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

### Canceling This Consent And Authorization

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to:

Cooper S. Wakefield  
Communication Studies  
102 Bailey, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd.  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045-7574  
Phone: 785-864-9888  
[coop-wake@ku.edu](mailto:coop-wake@ku.edu)

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

#### Questions About Participation

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) office at 864-7429 or 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, or email [hscl@ku.edu](mailto:hscl@ku.edu)

KEEP THIS SECTION FOR YOUR RECORDS. IF YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE, SIGN THE FOLLOWING SECTION AND RETURN IT TO THE RESEARCHER(S).

#### PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

---

Print Participant's Name

---

Date

---

Participant's Signature

**Researcher Contact Information**

Cooper Wakefield

Communication Studies

102 Bailey, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd.

University of Kansas

Lawrence, KS 66045-7574

Phone: 785-864-9888

coop-wake@ku.edu

Dr. Yan Bing Zhang

Communication Studies

102 Bailey, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd.

University of Kansas

Lawrence, KS 66045-7574

Phone: 785-864-9888

ybzhang@ku.edu

## Appendix 2

### Interview Protocol – 访谈题目

**Preliminary:** I am interested in learning about Chinese international students, their lives, their experiences, and their interactions with Americans. This is a chance for you to give feedback on your true experiences and feelings about life in the U.S., at KU, and interactions with Americans. This study may not benefit you directly, but has the potential to help improve the adaptation and conditions for others through programs and policies.

#### **Prior to coming to the U.S. or KU 来美国之前:**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself or your background? 你可以简单地介绍一下自己吗?
2. How did you decide to come to KU? 你为什么决定来 KU 呢?

#### **Experiences at KU/in the U.S. 在堪萨斯大学或美国其他地方的经历:**

[switching gears, I'd like to ask you about communication between Chinese and Americans]

3. In general, or your opinion, how do Chinese communicate with Americans? 一般来说, 你觉得中国人与美国人是如何沟通的? Could you describe communication between Americans and Chinese? 可以解释或者描述一下吗?

Could you provide an example? 可以给我一个例子吗? (even here you may begin to explore further their interactions with people, their conflicting attitudes and personal experiences. So try to explore both negative and positive (and possibly neutral) responses here.

4. We are interested in different ways, places, and types of interactions that occur between Chinese and Americans. When you consider the general chart of common places that Americans and Chinese interact, can you think of other instances of how Americans and Chinese communicate? 我们对影响中国人与美国人沟通和关系的不同的方法、地方和别的因素感兴趣。根据这个图表, 你有没有别的印象或者例子可以说明中国人与美国人的交流形式?

-Can you give examples? [Probe to elicit **positive and negative examples** if possible]:

5. Have you ever had or observed any negative communication, or miscommunication with Americans? 跟美国人沟通的经历中, 有没有什么给你 (或者你认识的中国人) 留下了负面的印象?

-Could you describe the situation? 请介绍一下具体的情况. What did you do and say? 当时你做了些什么? 你说了些什么? What did the other party say and do? 对方说了些什么? 做了些什么?

6. Have you ever had miscommunication with Americans? 跟美国人沟通, 有没有产生过误会?

7. In general, in what contexts (places, times, or situations) do you seem to personally (or notice that other Chinese) have more interactions with Americans? Why do you think this is? 一般来说, 你觉得哪些地方或者情况能帮助你 (或者别的中国人) 增进和美国人的交流? 你为什么认为这些地方或者情况有帮助?

8. Please choose one American (either from your experience, or from the experience of someone you know) and describe your relationship with this person. 请选择一个美国人 (或者是关于你自己的经历, 或者是你注意到的别人的经历。。。) 并介绍一下这个人和你 (们) 的关系.

-How did (they) you meet? 你是怎么认识这个人的?

-How long have you (or they) known this person? 你们是多长时间认识的?

-What do you (they) like best about this person? 这个人的所有特点里, 你最喜欢哪方面 Can you give an example? 你能举个例子吗?

-In your opinion, why does this person like you (them)? 在你看来, 这个人为什么喜欢你?

- Have you (they) ever done anything with this person outside of the context you (they) met him/her in? 除了你们最初认识的这个情境以外, 你跟这个人又没有做过别的事情? Can you give an example? 你能举个例子吗?

-What do you (they) like to do together? 你喜欢跟这个人做什么事情呢? Can you give an example? 可以举个例子吗?

-What sort of topics do you talk about? 你们一般聊什么样的话题呢?

-Have you (they) ever had any miscommunications or problems understanding this person due to cultural differences? (你有没有过因为文化背景的不同,而跟这个人有过交流的障碍或产生过误会呢?) Can you give an example?

-Has this person ever helped you (them) adapt to American culture? 这个人有没有帮助你适应美国文化吗? Can you give an example?

-Would you consider this person to be a friend? 你认为这个人算是你的朋友吗?

-Are there any other Americans that you would consider a friend? 你认识的美国人当中, 有没有一个你认为算是你的朋友? Explore...

-Why or why not? 为什么?

-Please describe a positive communication experience between you (them) and this person. Can you give an example?

9. Can you tell me about any other experiences you have had communicating with Americans (Global Partners, AEC conversation partners, or other programs intended to help internationals?) 除了你刚才谈到的情况, 你还可以谈一下其他的你跟美国人交流的经历吗 (特别是如果你曾经参加过的诸如“全球伙伴”这种试图增进美国人和国际学生了解交流的项目 (Global Partners, AEC events, departmental events,))?

10. Now that you have talked a little about your experiences, can you talk a little bit about what, either from your experience, or from your observation of others, are the most difficult things in interacting with Americans? 你已经讲了一些你的经历。现在谈谈你觉得中国人跟美国人沟通, 什么是最难的 (关于你自己的经历或者是你注意到的别人的经历。。。)?

11. Do you have any regrets in the ways that you have chosen to connect with or interact with Americans? Is there anything you would do differently (behavior, attitude, or communication) if you had the chance that you think might lead to better relations? 回想你跟美国人的交流沟通经历, 有没有什么让你感到后悔的? 如果可以回头再做的话, 你想不想为了改善你跟美国人的沟通而改变你的行为、态度或者沟通方式?

12. In your opinion, what could Americans do to communicate with and reach out to Chinese international students better? 在你看来, 为了促进中美交流, 美国人可以改变什么?

13. In your opinion, what would an ideal American be like? 你理想中的美国人是什么样的?

14. What do you wish Americans knew about Chinese students? 关于中国学生, 你希望美国人了解什么?

15. Have your ideas about Americans changed or remained the same after being here? If changed, in what ways have they changed? 那么回想起来,你之前对美国人想法有没有产生变化呢? 如果有,是什么样的变化呢?

16. Do you interact with other international students? 你跟别的国际学生(非中国人)接触吗?

-If yes, who are they and what is your relationship with them like? 他们都是哪些国家的? 你跟他们的关系怎么样?

**Future** 将来:

17. If you have the chance to work or interact with Americans in the future how would you feel about that? 如果将来你有机会跟美国人交往或一起工作, 你觉得怎么样?

18. Are you willing to be contacted by email for a follow up in case I have questions? 如果我还有一些后续的问题, 我可以通过电子邮件跟你联系吗?

19. Are you willing to help me by recommending friends for me to interview? 你可以帮我引荐一些你的朋友参加我的这个研究采访吗?

20. Is there anything we haven't covered today that you'd like to add? 还有没有需要补充的?

## Appendix 3

### Written Survey

#### Section 1

**Instructions:** Please answer the questions by checking the appropriate boxes, circling an answer, or filling in the blanks. 说明：请用打钩、画圈或填空的形式回答下列问题,.

**Sex 性别:** ☐ Male ☐ Female

**Age 年龄:** \_\_ \_\_

**I am an 我是个:**

- ☐ Undergraduate (Major: \_\_\_\_\_)  
☐ AEC student  
☐ Graduate (Major: \_\_\_\_\_)

**How long have you been in the U.S.? 你在美国多长时间?**

- ☐ 1 year, ☐ 2 years, ☐ 3 years, ☐ 4 years, ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_.

**How long have you been at KU? 你在KU多长时间?**

- ☐ 1 year, ☐ 2 years, ☐ 3 years, ☐ 4 years, ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_.

**I live with (circle the appropriate answers) 我跟这些人一起住:**

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 other Chinese  
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 other Internationals  
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 Americans  
☐ I live by myself

**Have you ever had an American roommate? 你跟美国人一起住过吗?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

**After completing your degree, what is your intention? 大学毕业后你有什么安排?**

- ☐ Return to work in China  
☐ Find work in the U.S.  
☐ Wait and see if I can get a job in the U.S., but if not, return to China

**If you you'd like to find work in the U.S., how motivated are to stay in the U.S. long-term (five years or more)? 假如你想留在美国找工作, 你长期(比如五年或更长)留在美国 的意愿有多强?**

- ☐ I don't want to stay in the U.S.  
☐ Even if I find work in the U.S. I want to return to China long-term  
☐ I am neutral  
☐ Somewhat motivated to stay in the U.S.  
☐ Very motivated to stay in the U.S.

**While at KU, how aware of your Chinese identity would you say you feel on a normal basis? 在 KU,平时你对你自己中国人的身份留意多少?**

- ☐ I become aware of being Chinese several times throughout each day  
☐ I become aware of being Chinese at least once a day  
☐ I become aware of being Chinese a few times a week



- ☐ I become aware of being Chinese a few times a month
- ☐ I rarely ever become aware of being Chinese

**Besides those for international students only, what sort of KU events have you taken part ? 除了专门为国际学生准备的活动以外, 你参加过哪些KU的活动?**

- ☐ Sporting events or games 比赛
- ☐ Organizations 社团
- ☐ Extra-curricular meetings 课外活动
- ☐ Clubs 俱乐部
- ☐ Rallies 集会
- ☐ Fraternity or Sorority 兄弟会 / 联谊会
- ☐ Other 其他: \_\_\_\_\_

**What specific things have you done to try to adapt to American culture (please mark all that apply)? 你认为 哪些具体的事情曾帮助你适应美国或者KU的文化 (可以选几个)?**

- ☐ Took a class related, to American culture 选了一门关于美国文化的课
- ☐ Took a class about intercultural communication 选了一门关于跨文化交流的课
- ☐ Read a book explaining American culture 读了一本介绍美国文化的书
- ☐ Read a book about intercultural communication 读了一本有关跨文化交流的书
- ☐ Discussed American culture with an American 跟一个美国人讨论了有关美国文化的话题
- ☐ Investigated American culture on the Internet 在因特网上查考了美国文化
- ☐ Tried to eat new Western/American foods regularly 经常试试新的美国菜或西餐
- ☐ Tried to learn to cook Western/American foods 试试学做美国菜或西餐
- ☐ Often seek out Americans beyond the classroom to improve my spoken/colloquial English 课外经常找美国人说英语以提高我的口语水平
- ☐ Discussed with other internationals the culture questions I have 跟别的国际学生讨论有关文化的话题
- ☐ Attended extra intercultural training sessions offered by the university 参加学校开设的其他跨文化交流培训班
- ☐ Joined the KU Global Partners friendship program 参加了KU的国际伙伴友谊项目
- ☐ Tried to speak English with Americans outside of the university 跟校外的美国人讲英语
- ☐ Others 其他:

☺ **THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!!!** ☺非常感谢你的帮助

If you have any questions about this study, or would like to talk with the researcher directly, please contact:

Cooper S. Wakefield  
The University of Kansas, Communication Studies  
Bailey Hall 1440 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 102  
Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7574  
(785) 864-1160; coop-wake@ku.edu

## Appendix 4

### Interviewees Information

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Years at KU	Years in U.S.	Major	Interview Lang? (Chinese/English)	Has lived w/ an American?
<b>Graduate Students</b>							
Wei	M	30	2	7	Communication Studies	English	No
Fan	F	24	1	3	Communication Studies	English	Yes
Lin	F	25	3	3	Edu. Measurement & Stats	English	Yes
Xu	M	24	1	2	C & I	Chinese	Yes
Fu	F	-	1	3	COMS	Chinese	No
Yu	F	26	3	5	Poly-Sci	English	Yes
Yang	M	25	3	3	Math	English	No
Huang	M	28	6	6	Edu. Measurement & Stats	English	Yes
Zhao	F	27	2	4	Communication Studies	English	No
Ke	F	32	4	4	Ed. Measurement	Chinese	Yes
Sun	F	26	2	4	Econ.	English	Yes
<b>Undergraduate Students</b>							
Ma	M	22	3	3	Industrial Design	Chinese	Yes
Hu	F	-	4	4	Journalism	Chinese	Yes
Guo	M	21	3	3	Math & Econ	English	Yes
Luo	F	23	3	3	Journalism	Chinese	Yes
Zheng	M	22	3	3	Elem. Ed.	Chinese	Yes
Xie	F	22	4	4	Journalism	Chinese	Yes
Song	F	23	4	4	Communication Studies	Chinese	Yes

Qiao	F	21	3	3	Communication Studies	Chinese	No
Liu	M	20	2	4	Undecided	Chinese	No
Cao	F	-	2	2	Accounting & Finance	Chinese	Yes
Peng	M	23	2	2	Economics & Math	Chinese	Yes
Xiao	M	20	2	1	Computer Science	Chinese	No
Tian	F	23	4	4	Journalism	English	Yes
Dong	F	19	0	2	Finance & Marketing	English	Yes
Pan	F	21	2	2	Pre-Health Info Management	Chinese	Yes
Du	M	22	2	2	Accounting	Chinese	Yes
Wang	F	-	1.5	1.5	Accounting	Chinese	Yes
Rao	F	23	4	4	Communication Studies	Chinese	No
<b>AEC Students</b>							
Ye	F				AEC/	Chinese	Yes
Lu	F	22	< 1	<1	AEC/Sociology	Chinese	No
Ren	F	20	<1	<1	AEC/Music Ed	English	No
Ding	F	18	<1	<1	AEC	English	No

## Appendix 5

### Survey Responses

Tables below summarize of some of the relevant cultural and intercultural activities that study participants self-reported via a written survey prior to interviews. The notable aspects of the surveys are: a majority of the respondents have lived with an American at some time, but relatively few have continued to do so; most students take some initiative in seeking to improve their English by speaking with Americans out of class and off campus; a majority of respondents have not learned about intercultural communication, or American culture in a formal way (although most have discussed it with an American); relatively few take part in or join American cultural activities; and only about half have discussed cultural questions with another international. In general, this data confirms the above findings that learning about culture and cultural adaptation do not seem to be high priorities for most respondents. On the other hand, the fact that most of them have taken the initiative to practice their spoken English reaffirms that language is seen as a primary hurdle that they must overcome.

### Descriptive Statistics: Summary of Roommates

Has lived with an American	22
Currently lives with at least one American after 1 year	0
Currently lives with at least one American after 2 years	3
Currently lives with at least one American after 3 years	3
Currently lives with at least one American after 4 or more years in U.S.	1
Currently lives with at least one international (non-Chinese) after 1 year in U.S.	1
Currently lives with at least one international (non-Chinese) after 2 years in U.S.	1
Currently lives with at least one international (non-Chinese) after 3 years in U.S.	2
Currently lives with at least one international (non-Chinese) after 4 or more years in U.S.	0
<b>Total currently living with an American or an international after first year (not including overlap)</b>	<b>10</b>

### Descriptive Statistics: Cultural Activities respondents have participated in

Sporting events or games	11
Organizations	15
Extra-curricular meetings	15
Clubs	11
Meetings	4
Fraternity or Sorority	1
Took a class related, to American culture	9
Took a class about intercultural communication	8
Read a book explaining American culture	7
Read a book about intercultural communication	4
Discussed American culture with an American	23
Investigated American culture on the Internet	16
Tried to eat new Western/American foods regularly	19
Tried to learn to cook Western/American foods	14
Often seek out Americans beyond the classroom to improve my spoken/colloquial English	22
Discussed with other internationals the culture questions I have	16
Attended extra intercultural training sessions offered by the university	2
Joined the KU Global Partners friendship program	6
Tried to speak English with Americans outside of the university	21